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DISCOURSES

ON

VARIOUS SUBJECTS.

DISCOVERIES

— 1848 —

DISCOURSES
ON
VARIOUS SUBJECTS,
DELIVERED
IN THE
ENGLISH CHURCH AT THE HAGUE.

By ARCHIBALD MACLAINE, D. D.
MEMBER OF SOME FOREIGN ACADEMIES.

SECOND EDITION.

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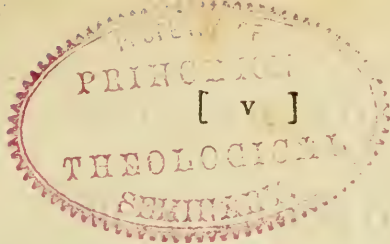
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DISCOURSE I.

On the RECTITUDE *and* DEPRAVITY *of*
HUMAN NATURE.

ECCLESIASTES, vii. 29.

LO! THIS ONLY HAVE I FOUND, THAT GOD
HATH MADE MAN UPRIGHT; BUT THEY
HAVE SOUGHT OUT MANY INVENTIONS.

THERE are striking contrasts in the present state of human nature. If in the material world we see light and darkness, order and disorder, growth and decay; so, in the moral and intellectual world, we perceive a remarkable mixture of knowledge and ignorance, of love and hatred, of virtue and vice, of suffering and enjoyment, of dignity and degradation.—It has been said, that such a constitution of things is the consequence

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quence of a state of society, in which a variety of conditions and characters is necessary, and of a state of imperfection and trial such as the present state of man. However this may be, it is the great business of the wise observer of human nature in its various aspects, to separate the work of God from the work of man, how closely soever they may seem to be connected. This is necessary in order to our forming just notions of the Supreme Being and of his moral government. It will also lead us to such a salutary view of ourselves, as will inspire profound humility, excite pious effort, and contribute to our preparation for that state, where order and virtue shall shine forth with unclouded lustre, and sin and misery shall have no place.

The wise King, in the words of our text, separates thus things, which ought never to be confounded. We see, in several parts of this book, that the errors, disorders and vices which abound in the world, under the government of a Being essentially wise, good and omnipotent, astonished and perplexed him. *He applied his heart to know and to search out the reason of these things; but he*
did

did not succeed: *for* (as he observes in the 24th verse of this chapter) *that which is afar off and exceeding deep, who can find it out?* But what conclusion did he draw from the ignorance in which this fruitless inquiry left him? Did he reject truths which were evident and certain, because, in the course of his researches, he met with things that appeared difficult and inexplicable? Because he could not comprehend *every thing*, did he, like certain superficial and hasty sceptics, take it into his head to believe *nothing*? No. —Solomon had too much *true* philosophy and good sense to commit such a palpable fault in reasoning. He had learned to separate what was clear and certain, from what was uncertain and obscure; and, after many unsuccessful inquiries, he arrived at the knowledge of, at least, one important truth; *Lo, says he, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.*

These words naturally point out two general heads of discourse. In the FIRST we shall consider the work of God, *who made man upright*, and unfold the ideas which are

contained in this expression.—In the SECOND we shall take a view of the irregular work of man, who has *sought out many inventions*.

I. The affirmation of Solomon, that *God made man upright*, may be considered—either, as it relates to the first man, the original parent of the human race—or, as it is, in a certain sense, applicable to mankind in general: and we shall unfold the ideas implied in both these significations of the phrase.

First, then, with respect to the primitive parent of the human race, it may be said, with truth, that *God created man upright*. The term *upright*, when applied to him, signifies an exemption from all corrupt principles and all irregular propensities; and this is all that is meant by the *perfection*, which is attributed to our first parents by the sacred writers. The first man derived his existence from an immediate act of divine power and goodness, without the intervention of *any second cause*; and, surely nothing morally evil could directly proceed from God, the source of order, truth, and good: no creature, formed with positive principles of malignity, injustice, or disorder, could be the immediate production
of

of the best of beings. He indeed, according to the Prophet's expression, forms the *light and creates darkness* in the natural world:— he sends *physical* evil, in the wisdom of his providence, to chastise and correct *moral* disorder; but *far be it from God that he should DO iniquity*. It was, therefore, an exemption from moral evil, accompanied with the faculty of reason, the innate love of order, and also with kind and benevolent affections, that constituted the rectitude of man in his original state. These lines of moral character exhibited a feeble resemblance of his Creator, which the sacred historian, accordingly, calls *the image of God*.

It is farther to be observed, with respect to the primitive rectitude of the first man, that he had peculiar advantages. No spot of corruption infected his birth. No diseases, entailed on him by vicious progenitors, disordered the health of his body, or disturbed the serenity of his mind. He did not pass through the weak period of childhood, in which the sensual appetites precede the dawn of reason and are soon followed by imperious passions, before reason has arrived at maturity.

urity. And, therefore, we can easily conceive, in the first man, a just harmony, a proper balance between the various affections, faculties, and powers of his compound nature.

But here it is necessary to observe, that, though our first parents were created, without any thing *positively* vicious in their original constitution, they did not possess that stability of character, which arises from confirmed habits of obedience and virtue. With respect to all *finite* beings it is *habit*, alone, that establishes the religious and moral character; and it is only by activity, trial, and exercise, that habits are to be acquired. Natural faculties are the work of God, and divine succours are his precious gifts; but in beings, formed for improvement and progress, the application of these faculties and succours to their conduct and actions is their work. This requires the exertion of their free will, the true principle and *cause* of moral actions; for an involuntary obedience destroys the very essence of moral virtue. The will, essentially free and active, operates by motives, which are not mechanical agents, as some philosophers have strangely represented them, but
reasons

reasons of conduct derived from our general desire of happiness, and our particular views of the objects, which seem adapted to produce it. Accordingly, a state of trial was wisely appointed to be the first state of man, as a finite, and, consequently, imperfect being, susceptible of improvement or degradation, happiness or misery. It was in such a state, where instructions and promises enlighten and encourage—where admonitions and dangers alarm—where temptations and difficulties call forth prudent vigilance and active effort—and where, even suffering and sorrow correct moral disorder, that man was appointed to run the race for *the prize of his high calling*. The dictates of reason lead us to consider it as, at least, probable, that all *finite* beings, even those of the highest orders in the universe, have had their respective states of trial, that is, have been liable to fall from their integrity, as well as capable of arising to still higher degrees of virtue and happiness. This conjecture is favoured by Revelation; for we are told, in scripture, of the Angels, that some of them *abode not in the truth, but sinned and*

kept not their first estate *. Accordingly, our first parents, when they came from the forming hand of their Creator, were soon placed in a state of trial. They were forbidden to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. This was the trial of their virtue; and this prohibition, in whatever sense we explain the passage, was intended to make them understand that unlawful enjoyment would be, to them, pernicious and destructive. All this shews that, though created *upright*, they were capable of improvement by turning to their profit the trial of their virtue; but, by the same reason, they were susceptible of degradation, as they had not acquired the habits of obedience. It is a general rule, with respect to all finite beings and things, that whatever can become better may become worse. Thus the first parents of the human race, though the noblest of the works of God on this globe, *sought out inventions*, and fell from their integrity.

But, 2dly, The affirmation of Solomon, that *God made man upright*, is not only ap-

* Jude, ix, 6.

plicable to our first parents, but, in a certain sense, to all mankind. This latter application is, probably, that which the wise King had principally in view. For it seems to have been his design to shew, that the iniquities and delusions of men must be laid to their own charge; which would not have been strictly true, if the affirmation of the text, that *God made man upright*, were not applicable, in a certain sense, to all mankind. That it is to be applied in this extent, the nature of man, even amidst all the ruinous effects of original corruption and actual transgression, still continues to shew by many remaining lines of its primitive dignity. Like a stately edifice, which, though struck by thunder, retains venerable marks of what it formerly was and might become again, if properly repaired, the human mind still exhibits manifest proofs of its high destination for virtue and happiness.—It is true, we come into life in a much more disadvantageous and humiliating condition than our first parents. Sin and misery, introduced by them into the world, subjected their posterity to bodily corruption

ruption and mental disorder, and, thus, gave a strong influence to temptation, and a fatal propensity to revolt and disobedience. Nevertheless, the original principles of integrity, and the innate love of order were never *entirely* effaced in the human mind. Virtue may be unpractised and vice pursued; but where is that mind, to whose eye virtue appears odious and vice respectable?—Does even the assassin, in a moment of reflexion, regard cruelty and injustice as objects of esteem, or equity and humanity as objects of disapprobation? No: his remorse sooner or later proves that *God made him upright*, and designed that he should be so, by connecting anguish of mind with transgression. “*Father of the Gods, (said a Heathen Poet,) if thou wilt not inflict any other punishment on the barbarous tyrant, present to him, at least, the attracting form of virtue, that he may be inwardly consumed at the thought of having forsaken it.*”

It is certain, that the original *work of God*, the primitive principles of rectitude, order, and virtue, are inextinguishable and eternal
in

in the human mind, though too often eclipsed and overpowered. If the corruption of nature, and the unhappy ascendant of irregular passions which succeeded the fall of man, justify that expression of the Psalmist, when he says, that *we are born in sin and conceived in iniquity*, yet, on the other hand, the moral principles and faculties of that nature, which still remain, justify the apostle, when he said, even of the unenlightened nations, *the gentiles which have not the (written or revealed) law, are a law to themselves: they shew the word of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness*. In all nations, (however diversified their inhabitants may be with respect to natural capacity, means of instruction, or local advantages,) the sense of moral good and evil maintains, more or less, its ground. There is an immutable principle in man, which never ceases to bear testimony to the *things that are true, honest, lovely, and of good report*, and to blame and condemn what is malignant and unjust, cruel, perfidious, and ungrateful. Even the untutored savage possesses this sense of good and evil, though it

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suffers

suffers much from the want of culture, and the advantages which may be derived from civilization and social intercourse. This universal *sense*, or *perception*, of something amiable, graceful, and honourable in certain actions, and of something odious, deformed, and shameful in others, shews, palpably, the original work of God in the human heart. It is a perpetual proof that human nature was formed for that true happiness which flows from virtue and order, and, consequently, that *God made man upright*.

But when, after considering the work of God, we turn our view to the work of man, the prospect is painful and afflicting. That pernicious inventions have been and are still daily *sought out* to counteract the noble work of him who has formed the reasonable nature for order and happiness, is but too notorious; and this must appear peculiarly deplorable to those who have learned, by a happy experience, that the ways of *wisdom are*, truly, *ways of pleasantness, and all her paths peace*.—These inventions we shall point out in a following Discourse; and shall conclude this
with

with some practical reflexions, which are naturally deducible from the part of our subject which has been now treated.

We may conclude, in general, from what has been already said, that the original destination of our nature, and the lines, however feeble, which it still retains of its primitive integrity, ought to excite in us a certain sense of its dignity, even under a just consciousness of the imperfections and deviations which are so proper to humble us. A sense of our dignity as rational and immortal beings, and the elevation of mind which it inspires, are not incompatible with humility; for true humility is *meek* and modest, but not *abject*; it neither excludes that decent pride of conscience and of virtue, which preserves from base actions and ignoble pursuits, nor extinguishes the noble ardour of a pious ambition to fulfil the high destiny which reason, revelation, and a nature originally *created upright*, hold forth to man. While then we deplore the abuses and *inventions* by which too many dishonour

dishonour the rank they hold in the creation, let us still respect *the work of God* in the heart of man, and in our estimate of human nature consider its dignity as well as its degradation. There are persons who, viewing human nature only on the side of its corruption, and of the vices by which, indeed, it has been fatally dishonoured, represent it as a complication of malignity, perfidy, and enormous selfishness; as a compound of imperious and discordant passions, and totally incapable of any thing truly good and virtuous. And from whence do these misrepresentations generally proceed? Often from the quarter of infidels and sceptics, some of whom call in question even the reality of virtue; sometimes from the theological opinions of those who think they cannot sufficiently honour Divine Revelation without exalting it on the ruins of nature and reason; and not seldom from ill-humour and spleenetic misanthropy. But from whatever quarter these misrepresentations come, they are highly prejudicial to the interests of true religion. Exaggeration and extremes are blameable in all things; but in religion and morals they are singularly pernicious.

It

It is proper to observe here, that, in our estimate of human nature, we may fall into extremes on both sides. If some exaggerate the deformity and corruption of man in his fallen state; others may form too high ideas of his excellence and dignity, considering the humiliating sins and infirmities which so easily beset him. This latter extreme is the less pernicious, as it furnishes to reflexion and conscience a source of salutary admonition and reproach, when, in any instance, we forget ourselves, and lose sight of the demands which a nature, endowed with the high powers of reason and liberty, has upon our conduct and conversation. The other extreme is at least susceptible of greater abuse. A persuasion of the total blindness, impotence, and corruption of human nature, discourages all generous and active endeavours to turn to profit the occasions and means of improvement. In weak minds, of a religious turn, it produces a too supine reliance on divine succours, which are, indeed, mercifully offered to human infirmity, but never designed to relax pious effort in *working out our own salvation*. In minds less principled, its effects are still

still more fatal ; for it flatters a voluntary indolence, and nourishes a vicious security. It places transgression at its ease, even before the tribunal of conscience, and furnishes pretexts, first, for infirmities and omissions ; and afterwards, in the progress of corruption, for all the transgressions of an irregular and licentious life. Let us, then, carefully avoid these extremes. Let us do justice to the work of God in our hearts, both by our sentiments and actions.—More especially, let this important truth, that *God made man upright*, be considered by every one of us as a sacred *rule* of conduct—a sure *criterion* of happiness—a palpable *prognostic* of immortality.

1. Let the truth of the text be to us *a sacred rule of conduct*. If man had not been originally formed with the faculty of perceiving the excellence of virtue and the deformity of vice ; if he had no active powers remaining, which might lead him, with the needful succour, to pursue the one and to avoid the other, he would not be susceptible of moral direction, and the exhortations, admonitions, and encouragements of the gospel, even accompanied with its succours, would be addressed

dressed to him in vain. It is because he was created *upright*, and still retains, though amidst much imperfection, certain lines of his primitive state, that the Gospel of power and grace has been sent to *renew* him in the *spirit of his mind*, and restore the divine image, dismally eclipsed by sin and disorder, to its original lustre. It was upon the remaining germ of moral rectitude, and not upon a passive mass of corruption and malignity, that the succours, precepts, and motives of the Gospel were designed, to display their salutary power and influence. Thus our moral constitution, as destined by the God of nature, for order and obedience, and our privileges by grace, which furnish us with succours to act well and wisely, form together a solemn rule of conduct, of which we cannot lose sight without sacrificing our essential, our eternal interests. Let this rule of conduct be ever sacred in our esteem! It is not to the inferior appetites and passions that we must look for a *rule*. Many, it is true, unhappily take them for their chief guides; but how do they direct the course of such through human life? Just as storms and false landmarks direct the mariner on a boi-

terous ocean, when he has lost his compass and his helm, and his pole star is covered with clouds. The passions are blind, irregular, and tumultuous. They were designed to serve, not to govern. Discordant and contradictory in their imperious demands, their reign is the anarchy and ruin of the soul; and it is only their subordination to a superior principle, that can prevent their rendering us both criminal and unhappy. How fatally is this verified in our time and day?

Thus then, you see that, by creating *man upright*, and forming him for order and virtue, both by the constitution of his nature and his Gospel vocation, God has given him a sacred rule of life and conduct. This is a rule which is always the same, whose obligation nothing can change; since it is founded on his own nature. It does not depend on the approbation or opinions of the world; it derives its authority from him, *who is greater than the world*. It is the secret and internal guardian of virtue; and the idea, that God *created him upright*, will restrain the true Christian from whatever is base, vicious, and disgraceful, in the silence of retirement and

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solitude,

solitude, as well as under the eye and observation of the world. It is here, though without any thing that favours of pride or self-sufficiency, that the good man will *revere himself*; that is, the work of God in his own heart; and feel honour and shame in the most secret thoughts and actions of his life.—While he shews a decent regard to the eye of the world which is upon him, he will still maintain a superior respect for himself; and will pursue the things that are true, honest, lovely, and decent, where no eye can reach him, but that of his Redeemer and his Judge.

2. Nearly connected with this is a *second* inference deducible from the truth of our text, which is, that it will serve as a criterion of the nature and means of true happiness, and lead us to *appreciate* the different sources of pleasure and enjoyment, which are offered to man. As human nature is a compound of various senses, appetites, and affections, the benignity of Providence has connected with these their respective pleasures and enjoyments. But there is a signal difference between these enjoyments, both with respect

to their *nature* and *duration*. It follows, of course, that those which are the most excellent and durable, claim justly the principal place in the esteem of a being, whom God has *created upright*; and such undoubtedly are the solid and sublime pleasures of wisdom and virtue. It is true, indeed, that our connexion with a material world renders the pleasures of sense desirable and lawful, to a certain degree. It is also true, that the pleasures of the imagination, which have their objects in the fine arts and in the elegancies of life, are not only innocent, when they are kept in subordination to higher enjoyments, but even commendable; as they afford an ingenuous kind of gratification, which the severest wisdom will not disdain. They are innocent objects of relaxation and entertainment in this present state, which is the infancy of our existence; and, in which, the mind cannot be always bent upon matters of a serious and important kind: But the frame of our nature (if its integrity and moral taste are not fatally vitiated) will loudly pronounce all these pleasures inferior to the sacred delight that springs from piety and virtue.

Consider

Consider the inward tranquillity, contentment, and hope, which the good man derives from an humble consciousness of the favour of God; from the contemplation of his perfections, and confidence in his promises.—Consider the pleasure which is diffused through his heart, by an act of beneficence which softens the distress of indigent merit, or dries the tears of the widow and the orphan.—Consider the internal harmony and peace of mind, which accompany his sincere endeavours to direct his conduct by the solemn demands of *righteousness, temperance, and a judgment to come*;—and if, after an attentive consideration of these sources of enjoyment, you compare them with the pleasures of sense, even in their most elegant refinements,—what will be the conclusion? Your hearts will surely feel the high preference due to the former; and you will adopt the language of one, who, having known both by experience, expressed himself thus: *Happy is the man, who findeth Wisdom! She is more precious than rubies, and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold*

upon her. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace *.

3. *Lastly*, The consideration, that *God hath made man upright*, has a beautiful correspondence with the promises of the Gospel, relative to the future perfection and happiness of the righteous. It is, as it were, a virtual declaration of immortality to man; for moral rectitude cannot die; nor will God leave his work unfinished in the human heart, but will bring it to maturity in due time, when that *which is perfect shall come*; and that *which is in part* (that is, designed only to serve momentary purposes) *shall be done away*. The lines of moral excellence, however imperfect, which the Christian perceives within him, even in a present state, in which the *creature has been*, more or less, *made subject to corruption and vanity*, will prevent his infirmities from clouding the glorious prospect which opens to his faith in the precious promises of the Gospel. He will, on the contrary, view the connexion between what he *is*, here, through grace, and what he *shall be*, in glory, here-

* Proverbs, iii. 15, &c.

after,

after, with an humble, but calm satisfaction, and an elevated eye of hope. As the husbandman perceives, in the feeble plant, which bends before the smallest blast, a future tree that shall raise its head, extend its branches, and become an ornament to the forest; so the Christian views, in the faculties of his nature, though feeble and imperfect, the grandeur of his future and immortal destination. Thus will he be encouraged to press on to the *mark*, *for the prize of his high calling*; and look forward, with delightful expectation, to that great and important day, when Human Nature, like the other works of God, shall appear honourable and glorious, that the praises of the Great Creator may endure for ever.

DISCOURSE II.

The same Subject continued.

ECCLESIASTES, vii. 29.

LO! THIS ONLY HAVE I FOUND, THAT GOD
HATH MADE MAN UPRIGHT; BUT THEY
HAVE SOUGHT OUT MANY INVENTIONS.

IN our preceding Discourse we considered the *work of God* in the original constitution of the human mind, as it is represented by Solomon in those words, *God hath made man upright*; and we unfolded the ideas which are implied in that expression. We come now to consider the irregular work of man, *who has sought out many inventions*.

By the *inventions* here mentioned, Solomon means all those deviations from the dictates of reason and religion, from the immutable laws
of

of righteousness and virtue, which disfigure human nature, and oppose its destination for true felicity. He calls them *inventions*, and the term is both just and expressive. It represents men as departing from a rule of conduct and a source of happiness which they carry with them in their own breasts, and eagerly searching, under the guidance of fancy and passions, for other rules of life and other plans of felicity.

We shall not here dwell much upon the inventions by which our *first parents* fell from their original rectitude. The history of their transgression is related with such brevity, as seems to forbid our entering into long and fanciful speculations on this event. All we know, or can know, of the matter is, that God created them rational and free agents, and placed them in a state of trial. We know, moreover, that they transgressed a positive command of their Benefactor and their Judge by eating of the *tree of knowledge*, which was the only object then in the world, that exhibited to them the view of natural *good*, connected with *evil*, that is, with destructive enjoyment. In whatever manner
this

this tree, and the prohibition to eat of it, may be interpreted, the truth conveyed to us by the sacred historian's account of it is still the same. Whether it had any natural efficacy of an inflammatory and poisonous kind, or was a symbol of sensuality and intemperance, or supposing it merely a trial of the obedience of our first parents; in every view of the matter, they follow their own *inventions*, their false notions of felicity, as a rule of conduct, in opposition to the express declaration and command of God. The fatal consequence of transgressing this command was positively set before them; but curiosity and appetite, seconding the Tempter, represented the matter otherwise to their deluded fancy, and (in their foolish inventions) they changed the truth of God *into a lie*. They strangely lost sight of the connexion which God had so solemnly established between obedience and happiness; they separated the love of *pleasure* from the love of *order*; and aspiring after imaginary wisdom, they fell into an abyss of misery and folly. By this fatal act they lost their innocence, their confidence in God, and their immortal hopes. Their self-love became irregular,

regular, and engendered a spirit of pride and independence; division and tumult arose in their minds; the supremacy of reason was usurped by the passions; they fell from their obedience, and by eating the forbidden fruit, acquired the experimental knowledge of sensual good connected with moral evil.

But leaving the particular case of our first parents, we proceed to observe, that by similar *inventions* their posterity depart from the original laws of rectitude. Deceiving themselves by false representations of things, suggested by a corrupt fancy and irregular passions, they think they may transgress these laws with impunity, and pursue rules of conduct and sources of enjoyment which the positive precepts of religion, and the internal dictates of reason and conscience, disavow and condemn.—We need not draw an afflicting picture of the errors, prejudices, vices, and follies, which, since the fall of man, have corrupted the integrity of human nature, and deformed the work of God in its original constitution. We need not go back to the history of mankind in past ages, in order to point out the various forms of superstition
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and impiety that nearly effaced all rational impressions of religion in the minds of men, the odious vices which degraded reason and stupified conscience, and the miseries and calamities in which mankind in all ages have been involved, merely by erroneous pursuits of felicity. The scene of human life through which we are passing presents this picture of man's degradation in the most afflicting colours. On the one hand you see man not only created *upright*, (as this term has been already explained,) but enlightened, moreover, with a Divine Revelation, in which truths, the most important to our natural desire of an endless felicity, are so richly displayed,—in which the purest precepts, the most encouraging promises, and the most powerful succours are exhibited, to dispel our errors and illusions, to direct our conduct, and to sanctify our hearts: but on the other, what devices, what inventions, do the passions and fancies of men daily suggest, to elude the demands and prevent the efficacy of this Divine Religion! And (if we look into the matter attentively) what folly, what corruption, what misery, must we not discover in these inventions?

tions? They exert their fallacious and fatal influence in *three* respects, which concern the most essential interests of man, in time and in eternity: I mean with respect to *religious principle*—*moral conduct*—and the *pursuit of happiness*.

First, with respect to *religious principle*, what unnatural inventions and efforts are employed to contest its obligation or to counteract its influence? If man reflect, upon the intelligent and moral nature which he derives from the Author of his existence, if he considers his situation under the providence and government of that great Being, as depending on his goodness in time, and on his mercy for eternity; what is the first thought that must arise from this plain view of his nature and his state? Is it not this, that he is destined to bear the character of a *religious* being?—When he is not considered in *this* point of view, his nature, his capacity, his affections and powers, form an aggregate of contradictions. Every thing announces his dependence. His wants, his desires, his transitory existence here, his evident destination for futurity, render the guardianship and protection

fection of an almighty, wise, and benevolent Being essential to his tranquillity. The sentiments and affections that are correspondent with these truths constitute the *religious* character; a character that ennobles man, and removes all the inconsistencies and contradictions which disfigure his present frail and transitory existence. But what laborious inventions are employed by some to sap the foundations of religion, to involve mankind in darkness and doubt with respect to their origin and their destination, to throw them into the arms of capricious chance or blind fate, and thus to extinguish every feeling of rational hope and pleasing expectation in the human breast?

And even among those who have not got so far as this speculative frenzy, there are too many who invent pretexts to justify their neglect of the religion they profess. They flatter themselves with the delusive hope of impunity, while they persevere in the violation of its injunctions and the omission of its duties. They employ all the sophistry of imagination to exaggerate the goodness of God and modify the demands of his justice, so as to remove all restraints on the gratification

tion of their irregular desires. In a word, they hope to be objects of his protection and mercy, though they neither contemplate his perfections, nor study his word, nor are properly affected by his promises and threatenings. By these illusions which they encourage and nourish, they are led into that state of mind which may be called *religious indifference*: and surely this is a state imprudent and ignoble in a fatal degree; as it is totally inconsistent with the nature of an intelligent, moral, dependent, and immortal being. For if the doctrines of religion are not palpably false, their demands upon our serious attention are most solemn, on account of their direct and intimate connexion with our essential and eternal interests. Here indifference is the most unaccountable and fatal illusion. If it proceeds from a sensual spirit of indolence and inconsideration, it is a criminal neglect of the high purposes for which man was formed: and what a lamentable aspect does human nature bear in those who, with a short duration before them in a present world, nay, without any assurance of enjoying its advantages beyond the passing moment, close their eyes upon

upon their future destination, on that *life and immortality which are brought to light by the Gospel*.

2. Equally deplorable and delusive are the *inventions* of many relative to their moral conduct and obligations. God has made *man upright*: he has implanted in the human heart a sense of good and evil: he has stamped the fair and unchangeable lines of beauty and dignity on the *things that are true, honest, and just*: he has rendered virtue delightful to conscience, and connected inward feelings of pleasure with every pious affection and every generous deed: so that (to use the expression of Solomon) *it is a joy to the just to do that which is good*. Nevertheless, how is this immutable law of God in the human mind evaded and counteracted, not only by the passions of men, but (which is still more shocking) by *inventions* and *theories* formed with cool and deliberate corruption, to favour their indulgence? For some will tell you, that the difference between moral good and evil is the contrivance of civil policy, or the factitious impression of early education, and has no object or foundation but a present and temporal interest:

interest:—Others, who pay somewhat more regard to the sacred laws of nature and reason, consider them at the same time as *general rules* of conduct, which admit of a multitude of *exceptions*, and easily adopt and misunderstand the precept of Solomon, *Be not righteous over-much*. Such corrupt casuists are too numerous; and their deviations from the *law of their minds*, in favour of what the Apostle calls the *law of their members*; that is, their appetites and passions, are unhappily too notorious, both in the public and private scenes of human life. A secret voice must, however, sometimes suggest an anxious suspicion that they may be mistaken. Certain inward feelings, which are rarely, if ever, totally extinguished, must disturb, in the hour of solitude and recollection, their false tranquillity; and intimate here, as they will awfully proclaim hereafter, that *God made man upright*.

Among the delusions and inventions relative to our conduct and actions none are more dangerous than those erroneous judgments which an excessive *self-love* so frequently leads imagination to form, with respect to our characters and the true state of our minds.

Under the influence of this deceitful guide the deformity of vice is disguised by false colouring. In many cases vices even assume the honourable appellations which belong only to virtue and true merit; and where corruption is not carried so far as to convert vices into virtues, it goes often far enough to make men regard the former as pardonable instances of human infirmity, which they are under no obligation to correct. Thus the culture of men's minds is neglected; and their fancies, humours, and passions are rarely presented as objects of self-examination to that inward monitor which God has appointed to be the guide of their moral conduct, and which he originally created upright. In the view of these deviations, these pernicious instances of self-delusion and error, is it not natural to recollect the exclamation of an inspired prophet, *Wo unto those who call evil good and good evil!*

3. It is by false notions of happiness that men are led into these delusions, and this is a *third instance* in which man, *though made upright, has sought out many inventions.*—It is here that he *forsakes* the fountain of living

waters, *and hews out to himself broken cisterns which can hold no water* *. In the constitution of human nature, as well as in the repeated declarations of his holy word, God has pointed out the genuine and only sources of true and permanent felicity to man. Reason and experience admonish him that his happiness must flow from pious and benevolent affections, from the peace of an approving conscience, from that temperance which contributes to the vigour of his body and the serenity of his mind, and from those hopes to which religion unfolds an eternity of pure and exalted enjoyment, at the end of this transitory life. Such is the path to happiness which reason, revelation, and experience point out; and this path will never mislead the true Christian in his pursuit of that great object of his wishes and end of his being. But this object is too often lost, because the true path that leads to it is neglected and deserted. In this wilderness of human life, through which we are passing to a permanent country, nothing is more common than to see men turning aside from the true path, and

* Jerem. ii. 13.

employing the most preposterous inventions to secure happiness, which accordingly is ever flying from them. They depend for *stable* enjoyment on the external advantages of life, which are uncertain; on the indulgence of passions, which satiate, without administering true contentment; on actions often productive of remorse, and on plans and prospects which are embittered by disappointment.

It would be endless to enumerate all the cases and examples which illustrate and confirm the doctrine of our text. There is no source of truth, no path to duty and happiness, which have not suffered by the inventions and devices of men. They have poisoned the best gifts of heaven, and rendered the most precious means, both of moral improvement and temporal comfort, fruitless and ineffectual. Even that divine source of light and consolation which God has given us in the Gospel of Jesus, to elevate our views, our desires, and hopes to a glorious destination, and soften the pains of our passage to it, how has it been misimproved, nay, often disfigured by the inventions of men! Its *doctrines* have lost much of their beautiful simplicity,

plicity, by impure mixtures of the devices of superstition, the visions of enthusiasm, and the inventions of metaphysical presumption. Its *moral precepts* have been exaggerated with respect to their demands by the excessive austerity of some, and almost reduced to a mere shadow of virtue by the criminal levity and relaxation of others. One set of men have laid an undue stress upon faith, to the disparagement of good works: another have represented *morality* as independent on *religion*, not considering that a religious faith is the prime, the vital support of moral virtue. Dissentions and animosities have been kindled by these extremes, and both truth and charity have been essentially wounded in the contest of human inventions.

Thus the original work of God in the human heart is counteracted by the *inventions* of man, in the various respects we have now been mentioning. Many more might be added, of which we need not present the painful enumeration. They will appear in all their unhappy colours to such as consider the present state of religion, morals, and human society.—Man was formed for happiness;

but such is the essential constitution of his nature, that his true and permanent happiness can only proceed from religious principle and moral rectitude. The inventions and devices by which he deviates from these pure and perpetual sources of felicity, *may* produce transitory pleasures; but they *must* terminate in his degradation and misery: and what we wish you to observe particularly is, that his degradation and misery are his own work; they are chargeable on him alone. God created man originally *upright*; and the primitive principles of moral truth and rectitude, though unhappily eclipsed, have never been totally extinguished in the human heart.—These principles have been reinforced by a divine revelation, which unfolds to us, in its sublime simplicity, the most important instruction, the most powerful succours, the most animating motives and prospects, to conduct our steps in the paths of virtue and true felicity. Under such a dispensation we can neither plead ignorance nor want of means, to justify our deviations from the ways of truth and duty. The best of men are not, indeed, secured against every instance of error and infirmity,

firmity. In the state through which they are at present passing to their high destination, the *creature* has been *made subject to vanity* *. Nevertheless, a security from all permanent and fatal errors and deviations is attainable by every sincere Christian, who has recourse to the Gospel of his Lord and Redeemer, as a light to his feet and *lamp to his path*. This divine Gospel is every way adapted to rectify all essential errors, to pour light into the darkened understanding, strength and vigour into the feeble and wavering heart, peace into the wounded conscience, and sanctity and order into the soul where corrupt and irregular affections reigned. By its affecting truths, its pure precepts, and the succours of that Spirit by which it is administered, it is adapted to purify and improve the moral taste, to quicken the discernment of that internal eye which is the light of the soul, and nourish those religious and virtuous affections which are its *life* in the noblest sense of that word. It presents, finally, the most attracting examples to excite our imitation, rich manifestations of paternal mercy, to encourage our pious efforts, and trans-

* Rom. viii. 20.

porting promises to animate us to a sincere and persevering obedience.—Thus in the dispensation of divine wisdom, goodness, and grace under which we live, ample means and motives are vouchsafed to recall free, fallible, and fallen creatures to righteousness and felicity. If man, therefore, continues perverse, his inventions and deviations, with the guilt and misery that attend them, lie at his own door. Reason and revelation shew him the contrary paths which lead to future happiness or misery; and as a rational being he must chuse freely between these opposite objects, and also be responsible for the consequences of his choice.

Thus you see that the work of God, in the original constitution of human nature, and in the dispensation of grace, is in perfect harmony. Both declare his love of righteousness and his aversion to iniquity. Both proclaim to the universe the true destination of man; creation and redemption unite to shew that he was formed for righteousness and order, for happiness and perfection.

Here then, with the doctrine of the text full in our view, let us consider respectively
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the state of our own minds; and draw from this important doctrine, the following conclusions relative to practice.

I. Let the declaration of the text engage us to keep constantly in mind that critical state of human nature, by which it is susceptible of the noblest improvement and felicity, or of the most odious degradation and misery. Raised above the merely animal creation by our rational faculties, which carry, in their capacity of perpetual improvement, palpable marks of an immortal destination, and favoured with Gospel light, succours and promises, we may rise to excellent attainments in useful knowledge and virtuous habits.— But, on the other hand, exposed to the delusions and inventions of irregular passions, we may fall into the most ignoble and unhappy state of degeneracy and disorder. We may enjoy the sublime delights and consolations of religious hope, which points to immortality, or wander in the dark and comfortless labyrinths of scepticism, which lead to anguish and despair. We may favour, even here below, the essence of true felicity, in the love and practice of order and virtue, and the
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sweets of a peaceful conscience; or may be given over to the remorse of a wounded spirit, the anticipation of future and tremendous evils.—Let the view of this critical state of human nature make those tremble, whom relaxation of principle and the imperious ascendant of irregular passions are carrying towards the fatal precipice which borders on destruction; and let it keep alive, in all sincere Christians, a solicitous attention to the snares and temptations which lie in wait to seduce them from their integrity. Let it, in a particular manner, excite our circumspection, when we consider, that every act of transgression, and every omission of duty, blunts, more or less, the sensibility of conscience, diminishes the purity of the moral taste, and gives a new degree of strength to unruly appetites. And if the noblest work of God may be so fatally degraded;—if Human Nature, degraded by vicious sentiments and unworthy actions, is a dismal object, and exhibits a species of deformity, of all others the most painful to a reflecting and feeling mind;—O! how should this engage us to *keep our hearts with all diligence, since out of them are the issues of life.*

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We may add, 2dly, That as even the righteous are not secured, in this imperfect state, from infirmities and errors; and as, in many things, we all offend, this consideration will prevent the true Christian from being high-minded, and will nourish in him an humble frame and temper. A sense of his dignity, excited by the prospect of his immortal destination, but tempered by the consciousness of his deviations and failings, forms a happy tenour of character, in which, if pride be confounded, humility is ennobled. By this humble frame, the heart will be laid open to the succours of Heaven, and, in the diligent use of religious means, motives, and privileges, will find a sufficient support, in every temptation. Thus, under the gracious and paternal guidance of the Great Being, who imparts light to the ignorant, and strength to the feeble, we shall gradually recover the primitive rectitude of that nature which he *created upright*; and thus *being freed from sin, and become the servants of God, we shall have our fruit unto holiness, and in the end eternal life.*

DISCOURSE III.

On the CHRISTIAN'S DIGNITY, CONFLICT,
and VICTORY.

I JOHN, v. 4.

FOR WHATSOEVER IS BORN OF GOD,
OVERCOMETH THE WORLD; AND THIS
IS THE VICTORY THAT OVERCOMETH
THE WORLD, EVEN OUR FAITH.

THE VICTORY announced in our text,
as attainable by the Christian, is as glo-
rious as it is important; but it is too rarely
an object of ambition among those who bear
the Christian name. The religious man, who,
animated by the precepts and promises of the
Gospel, aspires after the conquest of his irre-
gular passions, and resolves to combat every
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temptation which stands in the way of his duty, is looked upon as a being of a higher order. He is considered, in the sphere of religion, as men consider a hero in the field of contest; that is, as one whose efforts and actions are too exalted for general imitation. If he be admired and celebrated, this is thought, by many, a sufficient tribute to his superior merit; few think it their particular duty to follow his example. Some, through indolence or pusillanimity, judge themselves incapable of forming their conduct after such a model: others, from want of principle, do not think themselves obliged to this imitation; and thus, either from weakness or illusion, they unhappily neglect the virtuous endeavours, which can only subdue, with the succours of Heaven, the enemies of their peace, improvement, and felicity.

This negligence is criminal, and must be fatal in the issue. It degrades the soul, nourishes its corruption, enfeebles its powers, and turns the precious means of Grace, that are designed to arm us for the noblest of all contests, into sources of condemnation, to the *slothful servant*, who thus *hides his talent in the*

the ground.—Let us not thus forget our high and holy vocation. We are placed in a state palpably designed to exercise virtue by temporary contest, in order to prepare it for eternal bliss; let us not then lose sight, either of the nature of our course, or of the happy scene that shall open to us at its conclusion. Let us consider the *obligations* we are under to surmount the obstacles that retard our progress in a virtuous course, and the *means* with which we are furnished to surmount them in effect. These two points, which are evidently suggested to us in the words of our text, are worthy of our most serious attention. “*Whatsoever,*” says St. John, “*is born of God, overcometh the world.*” Here we see, *first*, the character, the conflict, and the victory of the true Christian; and, *secondly*, The means by which his combat is rendered successful, and his victory is accomplished, are expressed by the Apostle in the following words; “*and this is the victory which overcometh the world, even our faith.*”—It is our design to consider these two points; the *first*, in the present, and the *second*, in a following Discourse.

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I. 1. The essential *character*, and, indeed, the dignity of the Christian, is expressed in our text, under the metaphorical phrase of his being *born of God*. This phrase has been notoriously abused by enthusiasts; but it has, nevertheless, a noble and important meaning. It was employed, in the Jewish theology, to represent the change that was made in the proselytes to Judaism, under the figure of a new birth or spiritual regeneration, by which they obtained the privileges of those who, by natural birth, were the descendants of Abraham. Some of the heathen philosophers, more especially those of the Platonic school, used the expression in a nobler sense, as denoting sentiments and qualities, a character or frame of mind which bears some distant resemblance of the moral perfections of the Deity. The Sacred Writers of the New Testament use the expression of the text in both these senses, in a multitude of places; and comprehend under it both the moral character and the inestimable privileges of the true Christian. They applied it both to Jews and Pagans, who, converted from their superstition and vicious propensities, embraced

embraced the Gospel by an *external* profession, and assumed, *internally*, the temper and spirit of that divine religion. For, by this, they were introduced into a new scene, and were *born*, in some sense, into a new world; they acquired *new* ideas of God, of themselves, of true felicity, and ennobling views of the dignity of their nature and its future destination, which were adapted to purify their taste, their affections, and desires. This important change is, in Scripture, metaphorically called a *New Birth*; it is, in reality, a renewal of the mind, by the Spirit and Word of God. And this renders the metaphor beautiful and expressive.

Great, moreover, are the advantages and privileges conferred upon those who are thus "*born of God*." They are admitted, through their Divine Mediator and Guide, to a dispensation of mercy and redemption; where they behold the awful Judge of the world, under the aspect of a father. They perceive, in this dispensation, celestial mercy raising from despair the penitent offender; indulgence and succour graciously administered to human infirmity and virtuous efforts;—and a crown
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of eternal life and felicity held up, in prospect, to those *who are faithful unto the death.*— With such a character and such privileges, true Christians may say, with grateful admiration, in the words of the Apostle, *What manner of love hath the Father bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God?*

2. But, in order to the comfortable enjoyment of these privileges, the Christian has many conflicts to sustain: *He must overcome the world.* This is the duty which is solemnly connected with his character and privileges.— And what is *that* world, over which he is called to obtain the victory? It is the assemblage of all those instruments of seduction and objects of trial, of all the temptations, oppositions, and pains that accompany our present state of probation and passage. It comprehends those illusions from the objects of sense, and the enticements of vicious and corrupt men, which so often lead the Christian into fatal errors in the pursuit of happiness, and consequently to disobedience. The connexion of our text with what precedes, shews evidently, that by the *world*, which is to be overcome, the Apostle understands particularly

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cularly those temptations and trials which, in our intercourse with the world, have a natural tendency to corrupt our principles and endanger our virtue.

If the Christian, by being *born of God*, became totally a *new man*, in the strict acceptation of that phrase, he would have nothing to fear from the world. But this is not the law of moral improvement, which the wisdom of God has laid down in the dispensation of grace. All moral improvement is gradual and progressive in his government of finite and imperfect beings; and the work of sanctification, in his children and servants, is like the morning light, *which shineth more and more unto the perfect day*. By *being born again*, as that phrase has been already explained, we are not totally freed, either from our natural propensity to pride and disobedience, or our undue attachment to sensible objects, or the irregular impulse of our natural appetites. Hence arise opposition and conflict between flesh and spirit, between the *old* and the *new* man. The true Christian, though his eyes are opened on the folly and deformity
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of sin, though his heart is touched with the impression of his duty, and his hopes are exalted by the prospect of his future destination, will, nevertheless, always feel the weak sides of human nature, and that more especially in the earlier periods of his virtuous course. By the dismal facility with which external objects excite his passions, and kindle them into rebellion against the sober and serious dictates of his mind, he will frequently perceive, that he has yet to struggle against the remains of corruption, though he is not enslaved under its odious dominion. And it is on this critical state of human nature, that the world takes its stand to display all the artifice of its seduction in combating against the virtue of the good man. It holds forth, for this purpose, its maxims, examples, pleasures, and pains. Seduction and danger, from these quarters, surround the Christian on every side.

Consider the state of man with an attentive eye, and you will see how true this is. How often, and how early in life, is his reason, in its very dawn, perverted by prejudices, and his tender and flexible heart corrupted by

maxims relative to enjoyment and conduct, and fatal to both? He is taught to confound splendour and opulence with merit and true dignity, sensual pleasure with solid felicity, artifice and fraud with wisdom and prudence, ambition with greatness and elevation of mind, and religious principle with superstition or enthusiasm. These maxims, disguised by the colourings of seduction, gain too easy an access to his unexperienced mind, and that, more especially, when an early education has been neglected, which is frequently the case. Thus he is exposed, at his outset in life, to take illusions for realities, to adopt false rules of conduct, and to submit to the impressions of authority,—too often on the side of folly and vice. Hence proceed numberless deviations from truth and duty, shameful contradictions and pernicious habits, which it becomes difficult to surmount, which many, through a corrupt indolence, never get rid of, but which the faithful servant of God, armed with the divine succours of religion, is solemnly called to combat and overcome.

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The impressions made by evil communication and bad *examples*, give an additional degree of power and influence to erroneous maxims. When vicious examples are multiplied, they are dangerous to the principles, the sentiments, and the moral taste of the Christian. It is as if he breathed an infected air, which threatens the health and purity of his mind with its contagion. It requires, surely, great exertions of piety and principle, to preserve a pure heart and to maintain a faithful conscience, when the custom, the mode, the multitude, unite to give a fashionable aspect to vice and folly. It is here that a false shame, arising from the dread of singularity, leads the feeble mind to sinful compliance; and the seduction of example becomes more peculiarly dangerous, when the splendour of certain agreeable and shining qualities, in men radically corrupt and vicious, spreads a deceitful varnish over their characters and actions.

But could the good man stand his ground against the false maxims and the vicious examples of the world, he has still new dangers to encounter from its *pleasures* and

advantages. It was with these that the Saviour of mankind was tempted by him, who was a *liar and a deceiver from the beginning*, in that memorable scene which still holds forth to Christians an image of their state of trial in that of their Divine Master. Riches and honours are the good things of Providence, and have a real value, when pursued with moderation and enjoyed with wisdom, as subordinate sources of satisfaction and comfort. But the *world*, as that term has been already explained, presents these to the unexperienced mind in forms that operate strongly upon its natural passions, and *that* in the period of their ardour and impetuosity. It presents them together with its maxims and examples, which give them a seducing aspect, and have a dangerous tendency to turn the natural and lawful passions into vicious and irregular appetites. Hence proceed the cravings of avarice, the ardours of ambition, and the sensual taste, that extinguish the pure flame of virtue, and *war against the soul*, according to the expression of an Apostle.

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But it is not only with the allurements of pleasure and external advantages that the world attacks the virtue of the Christian; it often attempts to shake his religious constancy from another quarter. It sows thorns and opens precipices in the course of the good man. It has in its power a kind of persecution, by which it terrifies virtue. It frowns and threatens, when its alluring smiles and promises have been ineffectual; and can contrive vexations of various kinds, which, however odious and unjust, are naturally painful to flesh and blood. How frequently is the virtuous man exposed to the mockeries and railleries of the libertine, who holds him up as an object of ridicule, because he governs his passions by the dictates of his conscience and the sanctity of his vocation? an instance of persecution which is not of the softest kind! How often does the malignant voice of calumny point out and exaggerate his smallest failings to keep the profligate in countenance by diminishing the glaring contrast that there is between their conduct and that of the righteous? And even where piety and virtue are acknowledged and applauded,

how often are they left without encouragement or patronage, while unprincipled presumption is crowned with protection and favour? Nay, it will often be the lot of the Christian to be directly persecuted on account of a generous attachment to his duty in those corrupt, turbulent, and perilous times, when men are only *lovers of themselves*.

III. But if such are the struggles and conflicts to which good men are always, more or less, exposed in a present world, it will be, always, to them a source of comfort and encouragement, that they are not left without succours sufficient to ensure their victory. *Greater is he that is in you*, said their Lord and Saviour, *than he that is in the world*. This word of power he addresses to the feeblest of his servants, who hear his voice and implore his assistance; and if he be for them, it matters little who is against them. He that is *born of God*, saith the Apostle in our text, *overcometh the world*; that is, he shall triumph over its seductions and oppositions, its dangerous pleasures, and its trying vexations and pains.

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He will not, however triumph, without sincere and persevering efforts of zeal and activity. For if, on the one hand, he has the privilege of expecting the succours of that Spirit, which can *work in him both to will and to do*; on the other, he is exhorted and obliged, in consequence of these promised succours, to *work out his own salvation with fear and trembling*. He must fight the good fight, and surmount the obstacles that arise, in his state of trial, to oppose his progress to an eternal state of happiness and glory. How criminal, as well as unhappy would he be, if, amidst all the means, with which he is furnished to ensure victory, he declined the contest, and folded his arms in a corrupt and inglorious indolence, equally dishonourable to his noble birth as the offspring of God, and to his sublime destination as a candidate for immortality? Besides, he is called to combat an adversary, with whom he cannot enter into any kind or form of accommodation. He is called to combat and overcome the world, that is, its dangerous temptations, its pernicious maxims, its corrupt examples, and all
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the seducing or terrifying means it may employ to turn him aside from the path of duty. The *world*, in this sense of the word, is *enmity with God*, and it is enmity with man, if he knows his true and essential interests.

The state then of the Christian is a state of activity and warfare under the protection and succours of heaven. In this warfare he may sometimes yield to the enemy through temporary returns of infirmity; but he will recollect his powers, resume the combat, and persevere in it to the end. He is not invulnerable; but he will be steadfast, and none of the wounds he receives will prove incurable or mortal. Every accidental lapse will awaken new vigilance and circumspection, and every advantage he gains over the adversary will inspire new constancy and fortitude, which will ensure final success and a glorious victory.

The great principle that imparts strength to the Christian in his conflict, and ensures to his efforts success and victory remains to be considered. It is laid down by the Apostle in these words of our text, *This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.*

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How faith is instrumental in the Christian's triumph we shall endeavour to shew in a following Discourse.

In the mean time, there are *two* practical inferences deducible from what has been already said on this important subject, which we wish to recommend to your attentive consideration.

The *first* is the great and pernicious imprudence of those who consider this *world* principally as a state of enjoyment, and seldom or never view it as a state of trial and contest. Such an illusion is unaccountable in a reasonable creature; but it is the height of criminal inconsistency and contradiction in a Christian. When sin and disorder made their entrance upon earth, it ceased to be a state of pure enjoyment; and the nature of man, born with powers and affections which by their improvement or abuse may render him a blessing or a curse, both to himself and to society, shews evidently that his present condition is a state of conflict with moral evil and irregular passions, in order to his attaining the chief good of which he is susceptible. But in what lively colours is this important truth

truth represented by the Gospel of Jesus, which ennobled a sinful and fallen nature with these two sublime badges of the Christian, *Redemption* and *Immortality*? He that brought to man remission and redemption did not extinguish by his almighty power disorder and corruption; as if man could have been made happy by a positive act, without his own concurrence, moral improvement, and previous preparation for felicity. No; corruption and disorder were to be conquered by the redeemed, fighting under the banner of the *Captain of their salvation* the *good fight* of faith and virtue. Thus, under the holy and merciful dispensation of grace, the state of nature in which all had offended was changed from a state of guilt and condemnation into an œconomy of probation and trial; and our Blessed Lord, by assuming our nature, and by being tempted as we are, *though without sin*, shewed us, in his own example, the course we must follow in order to obtain the fruits of our redemption, even life eternal. *This is the condition of the battle* (saith the angel to Efdras) *which man that is born upon the earth shall fight; that if he be overcome he shall suffer,*

*suffer, but if he get the victory, he shall obtain eternal glory**.—Thus you see the fatal error of those who (though they be in perpetual danger from the vicious maxims and the seducing temptations of the world, and their own irregular fancies and passions) think they have no adversaries to combat, consider the world only as a state of enjoyment, and thus look upon the enemies of their virtue as the friends of their bosom. Such must be easily ensnared by temptation. The smiles of the world will deceive them; its frowns will terrify them; prosperity will intoxicate them; adversity will deject them; the pleasures of sense enjoyed without moderation or prudence, will corrupt their taste, and close their eyes upon the true sources of happiness; and the world itself will soon fly from them like a shadow, and leave them conquered by sin and death, in the servitude of remorse and fear, with a dark and awful futurity before them.

But, *secondly*, while we represent the world as a state of warfare, it is far from being our design to depreciate its external blessings and

* 2 Esdr. vii. 51, 52.

advantages, or to disturb the Christian in their enjoyment, by the remonstrances of an ill-judged austerity. For God is as bountiful as he is holy, and, according to the express declaration of an apostle, *he has given us all things richly to enjoy*. If his wisdom has appointed our present state to be a state of trial and conflict, how many sources of external enjoyment has he not opened in it to comfort us in our passage and refresh us in our warfare? The earth is crowned with his goodness; the general system of nature and providence is friendly to man; and the evils of life arise chiefly from the perverseness of those who abuse the gifts and benignity of their Maker. We have no conflict, properly speaking, with God's world; but we are called to combat the corruption and moral disorder by which man has degraded and embittered its blessings. We are called to appreciate the value of these blessings, and to enjoy them with that prudent moderation and pious gratitude, which alone can render them conducive to our comfort. In a word, the Christian, who combats and overcomes the corruptions of the world, enjoys best its pleasures

tures and advantages: it is he, *alone*, that enjoys them truly.

Let us, then, thus combat and thus enjoy! Then, notwithstanding all the toil and pain that accompany our conflict, we shall go on in *our way rejoicing*. Then, the hopes of eternity will give an additional relish to the blessings of time, and soothe the pains and sorrows of our present condition: and, considering the advantages of this transitory state as anticipations of divine goodness in nobler scenes of felicity, we shall enjoy them with contentment, until *the bread, which perisheth*, shall be succeeded by *that which endureth to life everlasting*.

DISCOURSE IV.

The same Subject continued.

I JOHN, v. 4.

HE THAT IS BORN OF GOD OVERCOMETH
THE WORLD; AND THIS IS THE VICTORY
THAT OVERCOMETH THE WORLD, EVEN
OUR FAITH.

WHO is sufficient for these things? This
must naturally be the first exclamation
of the Christian, when he considers the ene-
mies he has to combat in the corrupt maxims
and examples of the world, and the various
objects of seduction and trial, by which it
endeavours to allure or terrify him from the
paths of virtue. But when he considers, on
the other hand, the sources of power and
victory,

victory, with which he is furnished by his gospel-vocation, to carry on his warfare, his courage will be revived, and, amidst all his infirmities, he will be able to say, with an humble confidence, *I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me.*

Having considered, in a preceding discourse, the character of the Christian, and the critical and important contest to which he is called, we now proceed to consider, (as was proposed,) in our second head, the means by which his contest is rendered successful, and his victory is accomplished. *This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our FAITH.*

Faith, then, you see, is the instrument of the Christian's victory; it is, itself, *the victory*, (according to the Apostle's emphatical expression,) *i. e.* it is so closely connected with it, that the one supposes the other, and they become synonymous terms. Nothing will contribute more to nourish, in our minds, elevated ideas of that religion, of which faith is the vital principle, than to consider the efficacy of this instrument of the Christian's victory, and how it enables him to overcome the world.

The great efficacy of faith is a palpable matter of fact. In all the ages of the church, and even in the darkest and the most corrupt periods of the world, its triumphs have been memorable and illustrious. It was by faith that *Noah walked with God, when all flesh had corrupted their ways* *. It was by faith, that Moses rejected the splendour and luxury of a seducing court, and chose rather to *suffer affliction*, in all its most distressing forms, than to enjoy *the pleasures of sin* for a season. It was also by this animating principle, that those other worthies of ancient renown, though *they saw the promises but afar off, yet embracing them, were out of weakness made strong*, and through the vicious maxims, the severe trials, and also the allurements of the world, fought their way to a better and a celestial country.

And could faith lose aught of its triumphant power, when the promises were held forth as nearer at hand, and manifested with new rays of evidence and lustre, under a

* Hebrews, xi.

better dispensation? Could it lose aught of its victorious influence when the *Sun of righteousness* arose upon that world, which we are called to overcome, to shew morals how far it is to be enjoyed, where it is to be resisted, and to point it out, positively, as the transitory passage to life eternal, of which he himself is the dispenser and source? No, my brethren; the glorious company of the apostles and the noble army of martyrs held forth new displays of its influence and energy; and, by those who are truly *born of God* its conquests will be carried on as long as this state of probation subsists. If these conquests are not always visible to the eyes of the world, they are not less sublime on that account. The efforts of faith are chiefly exerted in the retirements of the soul, under the eye of Him who *seeth in secret*; but they will, one day, come forth with a glorious lustre, when the season of retribution arrives, and the crown shall be administered to those who have overcome.

But what is it that gives faith this victorious power? What renders it thus triumphant over the corrupt principles and the vicious examples of the world—over its sensible ob-

jects which are so adapted to seduce—and its oppositions and frowns, which are equally adapted to terrify or discourage? This, which is the essential part of our subject, we come now to consider.

1. Faith, you know, in its general signification, is a firm, rational, and full persuasion of the truths of the Gospel, of the excellence of its precepts, and the future accomplishment of its sublime promises. But it is not this persuasion, *alone*, that the Apostle has in view, when he attributes to faith such a victorious power: for, in the words which immediately follow the text, he teaches us to join with this general idea of faith a particular view of its principal *object*, which opens to the Christian a rich source of succour, encouragement, and power, in his conflict with the trials and temptations of the world. *Who is he*, saith the Apostle, *that overcometh the world, but he that “ believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?”* Do you perceive the energy of these words, and the encouragement and power they are adapted to diffuse through the heart? Do you sufficiently consider who it is, that conveys to mortals those truths, precepts,

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and

and promises, by which faith calls the Christian to contest and victory, and the circumstances relative to his person and ministry that are so proper to render them a mighty and effectual support, in the evil day of temptation and trial? These instruments of the Christian warfare are conveyed to us by an object of confidence, who, while he is clothed with celestial power, appears in all the circumstances that can render his mission encouraging to human infirmity. They are conveyed to us by him, who manifested the divine perfections in our own nature, and at the same time came to us, with amazing condescension, in that nature, *as a MAN, touched with the feelings of our infirmities, and in all things tempted and tried, as we are, yet without sin.* As the man Jesus, he has an experimental knowledge of our weakness and our wants: and as the *Son of God*, possessed of all power in heaven and earth, he can impart divine assistance to the feeble, and will not withhold, from those who have recourse to him, the all-sufficient succours of his spirit and grace.—Admirable thus is the Christian Religion, by its wisdom and benignity, and by its

gracious accommodation to the state of man, degraded by sin, subject to death, and struggling against corruption in a transitory scene of probation and trial!—Admirable, I say, is that plan of religion, which places at the head of the creation, a divine guide in our own nature, pointing out mercy and immortality to man, and succouring and animating him in his passage through this life to a better! In effect, truths and promises become peculiarly encouraging, when they are combined with the idea of a protector and a guide, ready to assist, and able to support and save. An eye of confidence raised to the chief under whose banner he combats, will lead the Christian to victory, animated by that express and transporting promise, *To him that overcometh will I give to sit upon my throne.* And who is it that sends forth this voice to man, and what language does it speak? It is the voice of him who assumed our nature, in order to glorify it one day, and make it happy for ever. It is the voice of him, who instructed us upon earth from the treasures of his wisdom, and displayed in his example all the attracting charms of righteousness and virtue. It is the
voice

voice of him, who deprived the law of its terrors to the guilty, but penitent offender, by his death upon the cross, and robbed the grave of its victory by his resurrection from the dead. And what language does this voice speak to man? It speaks the language of mercy and remission, *Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world.* It speaks the language of protection and succour: *Fear not, I am thy shield.—My grace shall be sufficient for thee, and my strength shall be perfected in thy weakness.* It speaks the language of exhortation and authority, mixed with the attracting mildness of condescension and indulgence: *Learn of me, and ye shall find rest unto your souls:* and the whole is crowned by the sublime language of promise and remuneration: *Be faithful unto the death, and ye shall obtain the crown of life. The world and its fashion passeth away, but he that doth the will of God, abideth for ever.*

What powerful impressions must this language make upon our hearts if we truly believe that he, who addresses it to the human race, is the *Son of God*—the Being who unites the tender and compassionate affections

of the human nature with the grandeur and glory of the divine? From confidence in such a being, all the sentiments that can elevate the Christian, and fortify him against the temptations of the world, flow as from their proper source.—Hence arise love to the Redeemer and friend of man,—veneration for the authority of the Son of God,—encouragement under the gracious and fraternal aspect of his compassion for our infirmities,—a firm expectation of the succours he is able and willing to dispense,—and enlightened views of the sovereign good, to which he is our conductor through a transitory state of contest and trial.

The more we consider this part of our subject with a serious attention, the more shall we be persuaded, that the high, yet humane, administration of such a being as Jesus, the *Son of God*, was, of all conceivable methods, the most adapted to give the truths and promises of a Divine Revelation their proper weight and influence on the minds of men, and to render faith in them a source of consolation, and a powerful incentive to virtue and obedience. Had these truths and promises been announced to ignorant, erring, and sinful mortals by a messenger,

messenger, surrounded only with celestial splendour, they would have confounded our feeble senses, and produced rather a transitory astonishment, than a sedate and permanent conviction. On the other hand, had they been conveyed to us by a mere man, however distinguished by uncommon sanctity and wisdom, they would not have been accompanied with that affecting union of solemn authority and condescending goodness, which are so adapted to excite effort, and to console under infirmity. Nay, had they been announced only by the glorious company of the Apostles, they would have wanted the crown that now covers them, when we look up to their and our Divine Master, the Man-Mediator, the man of sorrows, raised from the cross to the throne, and enjoying the glory, *which he had with the Father, before the world was*.—Well, therefore, might the Apostle say, *who is he that overcometh the world, but he who believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?*

II. But if the united characters of grandeur and condescension in him, who is the *author and finisher of our faith*, are adapted to give this principle a signal influence on the general temper

temper and conduct of the Christian; it is also certain that the various objects of faith, pointed out in the Gospel, furnish instruments of victory respectively suited to the various kinds of temptations and trials to which we are exposed in a present world. For, in the whole course of our warfare, there is no situation or circumstance, either seducing or distressful, which is beyond the resources they furnish to the true believer. This you will see by comparing these resources with the enemies he has to combat; as they were pointed out in the preceding Discourse. Is he in danger of being misled by the false *maxims* of the world, which are so generally known to corrupt the inexperienced mind with delusive notions of justice, honour, duty, and happiness? *Faith* holds up to him the *law* and the *testimony*, and raises his view to a righteous and supreme Law-giver, and the *reality* of that future tribunal, before which the secrets of all hearts shall one day be awfully disclosed. Does a multitude of vicious *examples* combine to corrupt the principles, the sentiments, and the moral taste of the Christian? His *faith* opposes to their influence

fluence the multitude that *stands before the throne*;—the immortal society of angels, and the *spirits of just men made perfect*; where his virtuous departed friends actually enjoy the reward of their labours, and the fruits of their victory.—If the remains of corruption and infirmity, which still, more or less, beset even the virtuous mind, excite too strong an attachment to the pleasures of sense, and the external honours and advantages of the world, *faith* will, here, dispel the illusions of sense and passion, and reduce desire within its proper bounds: it will teach us to estimate these pleasures, advantages, and honours, by a comparison which will greatly diminish their merit. While observation and experience proclaim their instability and their insufficiency for the true happiness of man—while the language, even of the libertine, on a thousand occasions, pronounces their vanity, and the departing moments of the degraded sensualist shew dismally to what they amount, *faith* raises the views of the good man to *that fulness of joy which is in the presence of God*, and to those *pleasures which are*
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at his right hand for evermore *. This will direct the ardour of his desires beyond the world, and enable him to *overcome* it, in one of the most important significations of that term. It will prevent his being enslaved to enjoyments unworthy of his high birth, his immortal nature, and his future prospects. It will make him blush, even to have hesitated in his choice, for a moment, when the interests of time come into competition with those of eternity, and, awaking from his illusion, he will say, with triumphant satisfaction, *Whom have I in heaven but thee, and what is there upon earth that I can desire besides thee?*

But, as we formerly observed, it is not only by its alluring smiles and pleasures, that the world attempts to enfeeble and overcome the virtue of the good man; it often assaults him with its frowns and terrors, with injuries and reproaches, with the mockeries of the libertine, and the calumny of the profligate, who exaggerate his infirmities to cover or countenance their own deformity. Amidst

* Psalm xvi. 11.

all these attempts to shake his integrity and perseverance, and to vex his spirit, *faith* is the invisible, the celestial Power, that will preserve him from impatience and discouragement, and render him triumphant over the adversities and sufferings to which he may be exposed. It supports the virtuous sufferer, by fixing his eye on the empire of Providence; which, for wise reasons, permits affliction to visit the righteous, to mortify their passions, and purify their virtues by discipline and trial. It recalls to his mind the paternal care of his *faithful God, who will not suffer him to be tempted above what he is able to bear**, and *who will make all things* (even those which are the most displeasing and painful) *work together for good to those that love him*. It presents to his thoughts his Divine Saviour, suffering before him, from his cradle to his cross, such a complication of woes as surpasses description, and addressing to him these words of comfort and power, *you have tribulation in the world; but be of good courage, for I have overcome the*

* 1 Cor. x. 13.

world, and in me you shall have peace *. And finally, the faith of the Christian gives him a triumphant support amidst his sufferings and his sorrows, by opening to him the clear prospect of that glory and immortality which shall one day crown his perseverance; and which makes him, at present, adopt the confident and animating language of the Apostle: *I reckon, that the sufferings of the present time are not to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed hereafter* †.

Such are the sources of power, from which *faith* arms the Christian for contest and victory. It is not, therefore, to be wondered, that its efficacy has been often so illustrious; for it must always be great, where faith is truly possessed. Happy those, who have acquired, and who cultivate this divine principle, which ennobles man, enlarges and exalts his views, forms him to the pursuit of true felicity, and makes him appear a being of a superior order, among those whose views point to no sphere of action and enjoy-

* John, xvi. 33.

† Rom. viii. 18.

ment beyond their short and uncertain duration in a present world.

But this faith, like all other Christian graces, is possessed, in very different degrees of improvement and energy, even among those who are not destitute of religious principles; and hence their conflict with the trials and temptations of the world is carried on with different degrees of constancy and success. In some, faith is feeble and wavering, and consequently without its proper efficacy and power; thus their lapses are frequent; and temporary successes, followed by humbling defeats, render their course unequal and unsteady, and their final perseverance and victory uncertain; while the Christian warrior, who looks forward to immortality with a vigorous faith, holds on, notwithstanding his infirmities, the even tenor of his way.—Thus you see that faith, like every other *good gift*, which proceeds from the *Father of lights*, is susceptible of improvement and culture. Enlightened by religious knowledge and reflexion, and nourished by habitual meditations on the divine
perfections

perfections and government, and on the truths and promises of the Gospel, it will increase in strength, and acquire new degrees of conviction and confidence, until it becomes (according to the beautiful energy of St. Paul's description) *the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen* *.

If, then, we cultivate this divine principle, which fortifies the Christian in his contest, by the prospect of a prize, which will be the term of his pains, and the completion of his true felicity, we shall certainly experience its solid comforts and its marvellous power. Infidelity, which shuts a deluded or presumptuous eye against the light of heaven, and sceptical doubt, which is, at best, a state of anxiety and weakness, give no strength, consistence, or consolation to man. To those who are in this case, *the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not* †; and this case is so unhappy, that in those *who know in whom they have believed*, it will excite still more the tender pain of compas-

* Heb. xi. 1.

† John, i. 5.

sion, than the severity even of deserved reproach.

But still more inconsistent and unaccountable, and, at the same time, highly criminal, is the case of many nominal Christians, who profess to *believe* the truths and promises of the Gospel, and nevertheless, instead of *overcoming the world*, are deluded by its pernicious maxims, corrupted by its vicious examples, seduced by its temptations, and sacrifice, to the undue indulgence of their fancies and passions, their precious time, their inward peace, and their immortal hopes. Let it not be deemed austere to expostulate with such on an inconsistency which deserves their most serious attention, as it threatens the ruin of their great and essential interests. Certain it is, that whatever their profession may be, the tenour of their conduct does not discover the genuine fruits, the distinguishing marks of that faith, which purifies the heart, regulates its desires, and *overcomes* the temptations of a present world, by a firm persuasion of the glorious realities of a world to come. Too often corruption and passions, which blind the understanding and banish
G reflexion,

reflexion, produce illusion and doubt with respect to the reality of these promises, or inattention and insensibility to their transporting objects; and hence arises a *kind* of unbelief, of which many are not conscious, though they be really in the case: at least, these great objects are cast at a vast, imaginary distance, though no man knows what *a day may bring forth*, and how soon this dangerous illusion may vanish, and end in a painful or happy astonishment. In the mean time, however, through this strange inattention to things future and eternal, (strange beyond conception in those who profess to believe them!) their evidence and importance make feeble impressions; and, consequently, the vigour of faith and its practical influence are reduced almost to nothing. Hence it is that the lives of many professors of Christianity have so little conformity with their high vocation; for the ardour of passions, and the power of temptations increase, as the conviction and energy of faith decline; and thus the feeble and superficial believer becomes a captive to that world which he is called to *overcome*. It is here, that human nature, elevated by the Gospel

Gospel of Grace and Truth, to such a noble destination, loses all its dignity and distinction. It is here that the *crown falls from its bead*, and its *glory is laid in the dust*.

Happy then those who believe truly, with sensibility and conviction, that *Jesus is the Son of God!* With what steadfastness and serenity of mind, amidst all their conflicts, will they proceed to the end of their short journey through this transitory life? And when they cast their views forward to the conclusion and the prize of their warfare, what a victorious support will they derive from a firm assurance of the accomplishment of the promises of their Mediator and their Guide! For he who *hath promised* is faithful; and, under his guidance and succour, true believers will also prove *faithful unto the death*, and become *more than conquerors through him that has loved us*.

Let us then nourish, by a diligent use of the means of grace, that salutary faith which, in its happy progress to full conviction, ceases to be merely an act of the understanding, and becomes, on account of the excellency of its sublime objects, one of the noblest affections of the heart—according to that remarkable

expression of an Apostle, *with the heart man believeth unto righteousness* *. Let us nourish it, by frequent meditations on its glorious objects, the perfections and promises of our God and Saviour.—Let these be the meditations of our morning hours, and they will arm us against the temptations and trials of the day: let them be the subjects of our evening thoughts, and the solace of our waking moments in the silence of the night. Thus, when the night of death approaches, it shall be deprived of its gloom; and when it closes our eyes on a present world, the dawn of a happy and eternal day shall rise upon our souls, and we shall find by experience, that the promises of him, in whom we have believed, are, *in all things, well ordered and sure.*

* Rom. x. 10.

DISCOURSE V.

The TESTIMONY of the CENTURION
considered.

MATTHEW, xxvii. 54.

NOW WHEN THE CENTURION, AND THEY
THAT WERE WITH HIM, WATCHING
JESUS, SAW THE EARTHQUAKE AND
THOSE THINGS THAT WERE DONE,
THEY FEARED GREATLY, SAYING,
“ TRULY THIS WAS THE SON OF
“ GOD.”

WE have, here, the testimony of *Natural Religion* * to the divine mission of our Blessed Lord, at the very moment when he was expiring in the agonies of an ignominious

* See this personification sublimely introduced by Bishop Sherlock, in Sermon IX. of his first volume.

death. It came from the mouth of a candid Pagan; and the ideas and impressions it seems evidently to imply deserve our highest attention. The whole scene of the crucifixion presents to the mind sublime and affecting views of the great *Author and Finisher of our faith*.

The miracles, that were wrought at this momentous period, are mentioned as the more immediate cause of that solemn act of faith and homage which was addressed by the Centurion to our Blessed Lord in his dying moments. Nevertheless, it is highly probable that previous views of the ministry, character, and actions of Christ, followed by that astonishing assemblage of virtues which shone forth in his trial and on his cross, had been successively accumulating materials for conviction in the mind of this candid Pagan: and it will not be improper to collect, under one general point of view, the circumstances which may have contributed to the fervent and remarkable declaration of the text, *Truly this man was the Son of God*. Without pretending to determine precisely the extent of the knowledge or faith of the Centurion, we shall only observe, that he had, by his

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situation,

situation, occasion to be acquainted with the ministry of Christ; and if we consider with attention what he might have known before concerning the Divine Saviour, and combine it with the awful scene upon the cross of which he was a spectator, we shall find that these circumstances were every way adapted to make him call out, with admiration and full conviction, *Certainly this was a righteous man, surely this man was the Son of God.* We mean to represent sound reason, in a candid disciple of Natural Religion, pronouncing this truth after an attentive view of the scene before us.

For this purpose we shall consider, in treating this interesting subject, *First*, The circumstances which might have prepared the Centurion for this remarkable declaration, and those which immediately preceded and occasioned it; and,

Secondly, We shall point out the sentiments and feelings which are implied in this fervent and cordial declaration, *Certainly this man was the Son of God.*

I. In considering the circumstances that may have gradually prepared for the de-
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claration of the text, as well as those that finally called it forth from the upright Centurion, let us represent to ourselves, in the *first place*, any candid disciple of Natural Religion following Christ to the palace of Caiaphas and the tribunal of Pilate, where he is successively traduced in the character of a criminal. What must have happened here? The first thing must naturally have been, an inquiry into the character of the person thus seized and brought to trial; and the first object that presented itself, in this inquiry, was a character whose unspotted purity restrained even the tongue of perjury; and a life against which a succession of false witnesses, perplexed and confounded, could not bring an accusation of the smallest crime.—An opposition so outrageous to a character, in appearance, so pure, must have excited the curiosity of an impartial spectator to examine the character more minutely: and if the Centurion entered into this examination, what glorious lines of human and divine virtue must have arisen to his view? Here he would have seen all the virtues that adorn humanity, and these in the highest degree of perfection.

In

In the *Man* Jesus, he would have beheld fervent piety without any mixture of enthusiasm; always expressed with a grand simplicity and a calm dignity, accompanied with that benevolence which is the essence of moral excellence, and which, diffusing benignity and compassion wherever he went, shewed his sublime and ineffable relation to HIM *who is love, and dwelleth in love*. Here, also, he would have seen that astonishing patience, which was never interrupted by the appearance of a murmur at the dispensations of Providence, and that serene and intrepid fortitude, which the most tremendous scenes of trial and suffering could never shake. Here, again, he would have seen that extraordinary mixture of meekness and humility with the intimate consciousness of perfect innocence and virtue, which never did nor could take place in any character merely human.—He would have perceived no acknowledgment of error or defect either in the living or dying moments of the meek and lowly Jesus.—On the contrary, he would have heard the greatest model of *humility*, addressing, with a *confidence* full of dignity, to the Father
of

of the universe this solemn language : *I have glorified thee upon earth,—I have finished the work thou hast given me to do—and now glorify thou me, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.* Finally, He would have seen realised, nay surpassed in the life of Christ, that sketch of the character of the *righteous man*, which the Athenian sage had drawn in the ideal flights of a sublime imagination ; and which was far beyond the reach of humanity.—He would have seen this sketch finished, in full perfection, in the life of Jesus, by the purity of his manners, the meekness and majesty of his deportment, and the benevolence that shone through the whole scene of his life and sufferings, without any mark of ostentation, without any mixture of moral infirmity.

Secondly, When from the intrinsic beauty of this sublime character in the man, accused of blasphemy before Caiaphas, and of treason before Pilate, the impartial eye of natural reason, in the Centurion, turned its attention to the *professed end* of the appearance of this extraordinary person, and to the nature and tendency of his doctrine and precepts, a new
object

object of admiration may have struck him, truly adapted to prepare him farther for the solemn declaration of the text. It is certain, that the upright attention of a candid Pagan, unprejudiced by the false and carnal ideas of a temporal kingdom, which at this time deluded the Jews, and mixed with their faith notions that, more or less, corrupted their judgment, might give him purer views of the design of Christ's mission, and the genius of his religion, than those that were adopted by some of his Judaizing disciples. If the Centurion had occasion to receive any information concerning the ministry, discourses, and declarations of Christ, he must have learned, that it was the professed end and purpose of his mission and doctrine, to restore mankind from a state of ignorance, corruption, guilt, and mortality, to the knowledge and favour of the Supreme Being, to the practice of virtue, and to the hopes of a glorious and happy immortality.—Now, as such an end and purpose, when expressly declared, and seconded by evident marks of authority and power, were conformable to reason, and entirely worthy of a celestial mission, they may naturally

naturally be considered as a new degree of preparation for the solemn declaration in the text.

We may add to this, that every inquiry which the candid Centurion may have made concerning the doctrine, the precepts, and maxims of Jesus, must have strengthened the presumption that he was a Teacher sent from God. He could not form an idea of any thing more excellent than the precepts of Christ, concerning piety to the Universal Parent, benevolence to his offspring, purity of taste and manners, and all the virtues of righteousness and temperance, that ennoble and perfect human nature. When he saw the moral instructions of this extraordinary Teacher, directing their influence to the inmost affections of the heart, and extending it from thence to the whole compass of duties and actions in every condition, circumstance, and relation in human life; when he saw these pure precepts enforced by the noble motives of love to the Deity, and hope in his promises, and that at a period of universal corruption in sentiments and manners; all this must have furnished new materials of conviction,

viſtion, and ſhewed that there was ſomething here much above the uſual courſe of things.— And if the Centurion had ever heard of the *peculiar* doctrines of our Lord, which announced grace, reconciliation, and eternal life to dying and guilty mortals; muſt not doctrines ſo comfortable to human miſery and guilt, and ſo conformable to the mercy and benignity of the Great Being, whom the Pagan ſages and poets call the *Father of Gods and Men*, have prepoſſeſſed him in favour of the Sublime Envoy, who, with ſuch dignity and authority, declared them to the world.

And, *thirdly*, let us proceed one ſtep farther, and ſuppoſe, (for the ſuppoſition is quite natural,) that the Centurion had heard of the extraordinary powers with which this eminent Teacher was endowed;—that, at different times, he had by a word healed the ſick, given ſight to the blind, calmed the tempeſts, and even raiſed the dead;—that his ſubmiſſion to the power and perſecution of his enemies was *voluntary*, and that, with all theſe marks of a divine miſſion, he had made no effort, either to repel the violence offered to his perſon, or to avoid the cruel ſentence
of

of an unrighteous tribunal.—Here, again, was a new and singular circumstance which may have prepared the mind of the candid Centurion for the solemn and ingenuous declaration of our text.

But, all these circumstances, however striking by their combination, we only consider as *preparatory* to this declaration; because their impression might have been more or less feeble, before the concluding scene upon the cross, which gave them their full and decisive power. It may be supposed, that all these marks of our Lord's innocence, dignity, and divine mission, had produced, for some time, imperfect and ambiguous notions and movements in the Centurion's mind. It is possible, that a mixture of doubt and belief, of surprise and conviction, may have fermented (if we may use that expression) in his wavering soul, until the majesty of those miracles that distinguished the dying moments of the Redeemer, decided his faith, and banished all uncertainty and hesitation.—When he saw this extraordinary Man in the hands of his enemies, and led to the cross, his feeble conviction may have been ready to fail.

fail. But one step farther, and it is revived by a new scene that arises to his view. For he sees the pure and exalted character, which had distinguished the life and ministry of Christ, shining forth with new lustre and glory on the cross. He sees the *Man of sorrows* administering, with the *authority* of a merciful judge, salvation and immortality to a penitent offender, and opening to him the peaceful mansion of paradise:—he sees him (astonishing spectacle to the eye of a Pagan!) interceding for his barbarous enemies in the very moment of their highest fury, and calling out in the language of mild compassion, *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!*—He sees him committing, with a calm and sublime resignation, his departing spirit into the hands of his Father:—and what happened at that solemn moment? The earth trembled—the sun was darkened—and Nature, racked with convulsions, bore awful testimony to the expiring Messiah.—The astonished Centurion enters into himself; and, probably, combining with this striking assemblage of virtues and prodigies, that surround the cross, all that he might formerly have learned concerning the
sublime

sublime sufferer, bears testimony to him in his expiring moment, and says, *Truly this was the Son of God.* The nature of this testimony, and the sentiments and feelings implied in this cordial and ingenuous declaration, we now proceed to consider, in our *second head.*

II. It would seem, as if an overpowering blaze of evidence had shone upon the understanding, and touched the heart of the ingenuous Centurion at this time, and that a peculiar influence of the spirit of God rendered the whole of this scene affecting and salutary to him. We may imagine, without going beyond the line of possibility, that emerging at this moment from the darkness of Paganism, he received from the sublime combination of circumstances, which ennobled the cross, new ideas of Deity and Providence, of human guilt and celestial mercy, and new prospects, or (call them, if you please) rays of hope, with respect to futurity.—All this is at least possible. But that we may not supply, by imagination alone, what the brevity usual in the writings of the Evangelists has left without a circumstantial detail, let us proceed from what is possible or probable to what is positive

positive and certain. Whatever sentiments of admiration and joy, whatever views of redemption and immortality, may or may not have passed in the mind of the Centurion, it is *certain*, that his declaration discovers a degree of faith in Christ's divine mission, which is entirely adapted to confirm ours, and to give us confidence and joy in believing. For reduce the signification of the Centurion's testimony as low as you please, it will still mean, that the mission and person of Christ were objects above the sphere of humanity : however imperfect the conceptions of this man may have been, whether he considered Jesus as a demi-god, or had less confused notions of his person and mission, yet still he perceives his grandeur, even in his expiring moments, bears testimony to his innocence as a *righteous man*, and acknowledges his origin to be truly *divine*. He did not (like too many in more enlightened times, who deceive themselves, and mislead others) shut his eyes upon plain evidence, nor seek in the refinements of metaphysical speculation (wherein the sages of this world understand each other so little) a buckler to repel the simple dictates of sound

reason and good sense. He could not consider as an *enthusiast* a Teacher whose precepts were so pure, and whose doctrines and promises were so suitable to the wants and sorrows of man; nor could he contemplate the moral character of that Teacher, and yet believe him to be an *impostor*, who had deceived the world; and *that* for no other purpose than to obtain an infamous crucifixion.

It is, here, worthy of your attention to consider, for a moment, what *incredulity* is obliged to *believe*. It has a heavier burden to bear in this respect than you, perhaps, may imagine. The deist may boast of having disengaged his philosophical creed from every thing absurd and contradictory to reason; but it will be found that, in effect, his incredulity implies a *belief* of the most palpable absurdities and contradictions; for it implies a belief, that a religion which ennobles and comforts man by the purest rules for his present conduct, the most elevated ideas of his future destination, and the most gracious succours for arriving at it, is either the dream of an *enthusiast*, or the invention of an *impostor*; and that the most spotless and sublime character,

ter, that ever appeared upon earth, is to be ranked under the one or the other of these denominations. Nor is this all ; for deism implies a belief, that the disciples of Jesus, whom he exposed, during his life, to the opposition of the world, exposed themselves, after his crucifixion, to persecution and death, in their most dreadful forms, to honour the memory and support the cause of a man who had deceived them. It would be endless to enumerate all the gross paradoxes and contradictions which the unbelievers in Christianity are reduced to *believe*. Let us turn our eye from the painful object, and while they prefer the perplexity of doubt to the consolations of hope, and the dark cloud with which their system covers futurity to the fair and smiling aspect of a blessed immortality which the Gospel administers, let us, by a rational and salutary act of faith, place ourselves over-against the cross with the candid Centurion, and say, *truly this man was the Son of God*.

Yes, my brethren, this Saviour and Guide of the human race, this model of all virtue, this sublime prophet, and all-sufficient Medi-

ator, who, as on this day, *gave himself up unto the death*, was undoubtedly *the Son of God*. While he lived upon earth, his enemies and friends bore testimony to his celestial virtue. The tears of the disciple who denied him, and the remorse and despair of the apostate who betrayed him, the perjury of his accusers, and the judgment of Pilate, made *his righteousness come forth as the light, and his innocence as the sun at noon day*. While he *was giving up the ghost*, and sinking under the rage of his unrelenting enemies, his cross was surrounded with marks of majesty that astonished the world. The elements of nature declared for him in his expiring moment; the vail of the temple rent in twain proclaimed his victory, and the voice of prophecy, fulfilled by his death, waited but a moment for a still fuller and more glorious accomplishment, when, having *drank of the brook in the way*, he *raised his head* in triumph, ascended upon high, led captivity captive, and received substantial and eternal gifts for men.

In the declaration then of the upright Centurion let our faith rest and our hope rejoice.

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On the tempestuous ocean of human life let it be our propitious guide,—in trial and sorrow, our consolation,—and in death, our strong buckler against that last enemy of nature; for since the man who died upon the cross is the Son of God, his mediation is effectual, and his promises of salvation and immortality are, *in all things, well ordered and sure**. Let us then, by that true faith which sanctifies the heart, and displays its power in a life of virtue and obedience, seek a part in these blessed promises: thus shall our peace be secured upon good foundations, and we shall be delivered from those painful apprehensions of judgment, which, from the depths of conscience, often torment the impenitent and unbelieving, even in the midst of their pretended incredulity.

Again—Jesus, who died upon the cross, is the *Son of God*; therefore his laws are sacred, and all his precepts are stamped with a divine authority: for he reigns with the Father, until *all things shall be put under him* †. Thus every duty he has enjoined, every virtue he

* 2 Samuel, xxiii. 5.

† 1 Cor. xv.

has inculcated, is not only the dictate of reason, but also the express and positive command of God. Let this be then a solemn motive to religious obedience, a perpetual incentive to *walk in all the commandments of the Lord blameless*, and to pursue the *things that are true, honest, just, lovely, and of good report, that we may neither be barren nor unfruitful in the day of the Lord Jesus* *.

Again—Jesus, who died upon the cross, is *truly the Son of God*; therefore he is invested with all-sufficient power to help us in our infirmities, and to *perfect his strength in our weakness*. Let us then look to him for power and support, when our strength is ready to fail, either in the hour of trial and temptation, or in the dark period of affliction and sorrow; because he can make light to arise in the midst of darkness, and the soul, which raises to him an eye of pious and humble confidence, shall never be confounded.

Lastly, Jesus, who died upon the cross, is *the Son of God*, and in this sublime character he is truly the *Resurrection and the Life*,

* 2 Peter, i. 8.

to all who believe in his name, and sincerely endeavour to obey his Gospel. Let us, then, look with comfort, with humble yet triumphant expectation and hope, to that illustrious day, when *this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality.* Let the anticipating view of this great period confirm our wavering hearts in the paths of virtue, purify and ennoble our sentiments and desires, and render us *faithful unto the death, that we may obtain the crown of life.*

DISCOURSE VI.

On the CHRISTIAN'S JOY in the PROSPECT
of IMMORTALITY.

[Preached on EASTER-SUNDAY.]

I JOHN, i. 4.

AND THESE THINGS WRITE WE UNTO
YOU, THAT YOUR JOY MAY' BE FULL.

Joy, or complete and full satisfaction, is the great object of human wishes; but it is not the growth of a present world, which sin and disorder have rendered a mixed scene of imperfect pleasure and real pain. The human heart is constantly sending forth this ardent wish, *Who will shew us any good?* The world pretends to satisfy the demand; but both observation and experience shew that

that its pretensions are delusive. Go to the opulent, the sensual, and the ambitious, and ask them if *their joy be full*? They will tell you, if they express with candour the feelings of their hearts, that many things are wanting to render their satisfaction pure, permanent, and complete. Nay, go even to the virtuous man, who has, generally speaking, the fairest chance for happiness, even here, and ask *him* if his earthly connexions and advantages are fully competent to his desires of felicity? He will answer you by an avowal of his wants and infirmities; by a detail of the discords, vices, and disorders, that poison human society; and pointing also to the ruins of time, and the tombs of his friends, he will tell you, that the *creature* has been made *subject to vanity*.

Where then shall we seek for the source of a pure and permanent joy? Do not seek it in the imagined wisdom of the infidel, whose dismal philosophy exaggerates all your sufferings and extinguishes all your hopes: and if you have recourse to the less absurd dictates of Pagan wisdom; you will find, even there, but imperfect encouragement and comfort. It

is true, the Athenian sage was wise enough to look to futurity for that complete happiness, which is the wish of nature ; but painful doubts more or less clouded the prospect. Even after him, the gloomy fears of death continued to hold the world in bondage. Philosophers and poets lamented the lot of humanity, in the view of the grave, which terminates a short existence, mixed with sorrow, labour, and pain. Facitious joys were invented to banish from reflexion the fatal moment, or to intoxicate dejection at the thoughts of its approach. But such remedies were insufficient to remove the disorder, and often produced a more painful relapse.

In this period of darkness and despondency, the Son of God appeared upon earth, *died for our sins, arose for our justification* ; and, by that triumphant act, called out to mortals, *I am the resurrection and the life ; whoever believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live* *. Methinks, at these glad tidings, the inhabitants of the world, in the sublime prospect of life eternal, ought to have sent

* John, xi. 25.

forth a general acclamation of joy, and answered the Redeemer in words similar to those of the Apostle; *O Death, where is thy sting? O Grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God, who has given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!*—Such, indeed, was the effect of these glad tidings on a multitude of captives, who were under servitude to the fear of death; and it is the design of the festival, on which we are now assembled, to renew and nourish the sacred joy which the glorious resurrection of our Lord and Master should excite in our hearts.—This also is the object presented to us in the words of our text: for the Apostle, after having mentioned in the preceding verses, that eternal life, which was manifested by both the resurrection and the promise of our Blessed Lord, and declared that all true Christians are partakers of that life in consequence of their communion with the Father and the Son, adds, in the words before us, *These things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.*

Three things, therefore, are naturally presented to our meditations on this subject.

First,

First, The nature of that joy, which the prospect of life eternal is adapted to administer.

Secondly, Certain circumstances which modify or diminish this joy, and hinder it from being *full* and complete, in many, who are, otherwise, sincere Christians.

Thirdly, The importance of cultivating and nourishing this pious joy, and its happy influence on the character and course of the true Christian.

I. It is certain that the prospect of eternal life is a real and solid foundation of joy. When the Ethiopian nobleman (of whom we read in the Acts of the Apostles) received from Philip the tidings of salvation, and saw the *Sun of righteousness* and immortality arising to his hopes, we are told, that *he went on in his way rejoicing* *. And, indeed, how is it possible, that born, as we are, with a desire of felicity, unmixed and unlimited, the prospect of a happy immortality should not be pleasing and delightful? The pains and sorrows of our present condition, and the

* Acts, viii. 39.

manifold imperfections that follow us through this first period of our existence, must render this sublime prospect peculiarly attracting.—We all know, or, at least, we ought to know, the misery that attends ignorance, corruption, and irregular passions in a present world; we know how they poison that kind of felicity for which the nature of man was formed, and how they compensate broken visions of unsatisfactory pleasure, by ever-returning feelings of regret and disgust. We know how society is embittered here below, by the discords, suspicions, jealousies, and animosities, which self-love and passions excite and foment upon earth. We know how these degrade the mind, blunt the delicacy of its finest feelings, and, on many occasions, even disturb the serenity of piety and virtue. The prospect, then, of an immortal society, free from the pains of *natural* evil, and the still more unhappy fruits of *moral* disorder, and ennobled by high improvements in knowledge, sanctity, and benevolence, must be a pure source of satisfaction and delight,

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The *nature* of this joy is much superior to that which results from the expectations of the best external advantages of a present world. These are either uncertain or unsatisfactory. They are either subject to disappointment or followed by satiety. The pleasure which arises from their possession is often interrupted by discontent, weariness, and dejected spirits, and, neither in prospect nor in possession, do they bless the soul with that even tenour of serenity and self-enjoyment which flows from the hopes of a happy immortality.

Again—The joy of our text must not be confounded with enthusiasm, in the unfavourable sense of that word; because it is pure, stable, and sedate, and is neither nourished by the ardour of passion nor the flights of fancy, but by the sublime realities of a world to come. Moreover, tempered by humility and Godly fear, it does not rise to effervescence and tumult: encouraged by its views of Divine mercy, it does not yield to anxiety and dejection, and the grandeur of its objects, seen only as *through a glass darkly*,
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in an unknown region, inspire a kind of awe, which is adapted to correct the intemperate effusions of enthusiasm in the true Christian.

Finally, under this article, the satisfaction and joy which the good man feels in the view of his future and immortal destination, is *improvable* and progressive, both in its degrees and in its stability. It increases in proportion to the progress he makes in the virtues of the Christian life: every act of religion sincerely performed, every pious thought that arises to the throne, every exertion of benevolence, every virtuous effort of self-government, every elevation of faith to the promises of his Saviour and his God, gives it a new glow; and thus it becomes, in some measure, the habitual and settled temper of the soul.

Such is the nature of that joy, which the view of our future destination ought to excite. But as nothing is perfect here below, so it happens that this joy is not always pure and undisturbed, even in good minds. There are certain circumstances that sometimes modify
and

and diminish it; and these we come now to consider in the *second head* of this Discourse.

II. There are *four things* which (more or less, in different persons and characters) have a tendency to suspend or diminish the joy we have been now describing; these are, weakness of faith,—the influence of sensible objects,—a natural aversion to death,—and a sense of demerit or of great infirmities.

I. There is a kind of latent doubting which sometimes troubles the satisfaction even of good minds. They do not disbelieve the sublime and positive declarations of the Gospel with respect to the glories of a future and eternal state: but there is a certain degree of weakness and instability in their persuasion of the reality of these glorious objects. They are in the case of the man in the Gospel, who, on a certain occasion, said to Christ, *I believe, Lord! help thou my unbelief**. A kind of surprise and astonishment comes across their minds, in the contemplation of those invisible

* Mark, ix. 24.

and distant objects, whose *local* is unknown, and whose nature is supposed (perhaps erroneously) to be totally different from our present mode of existence and enjoyment; and this leads them to say with Nicodemus, *how can these things be?* We are so accustomed and attached to our present manner of being, that a total or even a considerable change, though only in its external forms, astonishes imagination, and thus, sometimes, staggers faith; and when the impressions of faith are feeble, the joy, which its glorious objects excite, is proportionally diminished.

But, *O ye of little faith!* learn to *know* better in whom ye have believed. It is true, the change which succeeds our present state of existence is great and momentous; but know ye not the goodness, grace, and omnipotence of him who has decreed and will perform it? You may see some things which look like notices or prefigurations of it in the works of Nature before your eyes. Behold the vegetable and animal worlds, and see what surprising changes and transformations, of a beautiful kind, diversify their state. When you see the flower coming forth full blown, and the
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crawling caterpillar changed into a brilliant and active inhabitant of the air, what is it natural to conclude from this? Let us reason after the manner of our Blessed Lord. If God changes, clothes, and transforms so wonderfully the grass of the field and the insects of the earth, is it surprising that human nature, in a future period, should be gloriously changed by his Almighty goodness and grace, and that new and sublime scenes of action and enjoyment should be opened to the righteous, *when that which is perfect shall come, and that which is in part shall be done away?*

Dwell then, O ye whose faith is ready to fail! on the works of God by pious contemplation. From what he has done in this fleeting scene of mortality, judge what he may do in the endless ages of eternity. Dwell on his promises, in those precious hours of retirement and recollection, which restore man to himself and to his God. Dwell on his promises and ascend with them to a future world. Say within yourself, He that has set the sun in his pavilion, can one day put an end to all darkness. He who is the author of every good and perfect gift can one day raise his
children

children above all evil. Realize to your minds that blessed society (which certainly exists) from which all pain and disorder are banished, and where light, sanctity, and charity reign for ever. By these acts of piety, frequently repeated, doubts will be dispelled, pure and elevated desires will be kindled, persuasion will triumph, and joy be increased.

We observed, *secondly*, that the influence of sensible objects and enjoyments, when not under proper regulations, damps the joy which arises from the prospect of a happy immortality. Observation and experience confirm this truth, and it is founded on the nature of things. A prevailing habit of dissipation, too great an attachment to the pleasures of sense, too frequent approaches to scenes of luxury and frivolity, corrupt the taste for virtuous enjoyment, for the pleasures of reason, faith, and religious hope. They contract the mind, and extinguish the mild flame of those pure and elevated desires which aspire after immortality, and render its prospect delightful. There are, unhappily, people in the world who have scarcely an idea of any enjoyment beyond what the Apostle call the *lusts of the flesh*,

flesh, the *lusts of the eye*, and the *pride of life*. Talk to such of future happiness, of the dignity of a well-regulated mind, of the pleasures of order, sanctity, and benevolence: you might as well talk of sounds to the deaf, or colours to the blind. This can never be the case of true Christians; yet even *they* ought to be upon their guard against all approaches to such a state of degradation. For there is always more or less caution necessary in the enjoyment of sensible objects, which, though innocent in its nature, may be dangerous in its measure, and is always dangerous when it is not counterbalanced by pleasures and enjoyments of a nobler kind. In such a case it gradually corrupts the moral taste, and troubles the joy of the Christian in the prospect of his high destination.

3. A third circumstance that diminishes this joy is that *aversion to death* which is natural to man. Death, indeed, was the enemy of man, until the promises of the Gospel removed *its sting*, and the resurrection of Christ robbed it of *its victory*. Nay, death is still more or less painful to nature, where life has not been embittered, in a peculiar manner,

manner, by suffering and sorrow. It is more especially adapted to damp the joys and pleasures of the libertine and the impenitent, because it is the term, to say no more; of their enjoyments and hopes. To leave a world in which they have enjoyed much pleasure; and in which alone their desires and expectations have been fixed; to leave it without any hopes from another, nay, with the fears and apprehensions of conscience (if it is not hardened) from a future scene; this indeed is gloomy. Here they cannot *think* without desponding, and it is only the total absence of reflexion that can prevent the deepest dejection and anxiety. Even to the sincere Christian, the transition may appear awful. Such it is; but shall the short dark passage of a moment, which leads to the dawn of an eternal day, prevent the joy which the rising beams of that happy day are adapted to excite in the Christian's heart? This would be giving too much indulgence to the instinctive reluctance of nature against death, and paying too little regard to the sublime prospect of *life and immortality that is brought to light by the Gospel*. It is not the prospect of death that

ought to diminish the joy of the Christian's hope, but it is this glorious hope that ought to exult over the prospect of death, and gild the horrors of the tomb. *In the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for thou art with me.* This is the support and buckler of the Christian, and, accordingly, many have given affecting examples of undisturbed tranquillity at that awful moment. In the extremities of dissolving nature, they have, with joyful confidence, committed their spirits into the hands of their heavenly Father, and of the Divine Saviour who died for them and rose again.

4. Lastly, under this head the consciousness of demerit and infirmity sometimes dejects even good Christians, and hinders their *joy* from being *full* and complete in the prospect of immortality. But when this consciousness of demerit proceeds from a true principle of humility, it ought neither to diminish the hope nor the joy of the sincere Christian. It is humility that God will exalt. It is the essential virtue of sinful man, and one of the virtues of the Christian life, to which acceptance is peculiarly promised. The compassionate

fionate Saviour and Friend of souls encourages us to look to him with confidence, even in the midst of our infirmities; and this confidence is, in itself, a pleasing sentiment.—No doubt, humility tempers joy with profound reverence and godly fear. Mercy and justice are united on that throne before which we must give our final account; and if the promises of the former call upon us to *rejoice* in the God of our salvation, the demands of the latter must engage us to *work out our own salvation with fear and trembling*.

Let then the humble sense of our sins and infirmities temper our joy, but not extinguish it! Let it guard our joy against security and presumption, but not trouble its pure and gentle stream. Let it not hinder us to rejoice and triumph in the promises of our Redeemer; but let it engage us to rejoice and triumph with a modest and humble view of our critical state, our sins and imperfections, our dust and ashes.

But, however necessary it may be in the present imperfect state of the Christian, that his joy should be thus tempered with sentiments suitable to the infirmities that attend

him, and the crosses and lapses to which he is exposed, it is, nevertheless, of great importance to the best improvement of the Christian character to cultivate a spirit of joyful hope in the prospect of immortality; as this spirit must have a happy influence on the character and course of the true Christian. — This is what we proposed to consider in our *third head*.

III. And here we observe, in the *first place*, that the joy which arises from the prospect of a happy immortality ennobles and purifies the mind. The prospect of a state, in which order, light, and love shall reign for ever, inspires pure and elevating sentiments. The joy which it excites, enables the Christian to appreciate truly the pleasures and advantages of the present transitory state of his existence. Living here below with an eye raised to immortality, he will not drink of the poisonous cup of vicious pleasure; for he quenches his thirst for happiness at a purer fountain, and will thus enjoy the pleasures of the world without being corrupted by them. The joy of our text *cleanseth*, in effect, *from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit*;
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it is a powerful preservative against the influence of those sensual appetites and passions which captivate and degrade the soul. It forms true greatness of mind, and inspires a generous disdain of every thing that is base, sordid, or impure.

Secondly, The rejoicing view of immortality is a rich source of comfort to the good man in the dark seasons of Divine Providence. It sends, in the day of adversity, reviving rays that diminish its gloom and alleviate its pains and sorrows. In all the calamities, whether public or private, of a present world, it enables *patience* to perform *its perfect work*. The Christian, delighted with the fair prospects of order, peace, and exemption from evil, which open upon him in a happy futurity, enjoys a sacred calm amidst the confusion and tumults of this present world. He is not, however, insensible to the miseries of humanity, to the dreadful scenes of calamity and desolation which the unbridled rage of the wicked produces upon earth; but he soothes the anguish of his generous feelings, by lifting an eye of pleasing hope to *that rest that remains for the people*
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of God,—to that celestial region where sin and sorrow shall never be known.

Thirdly, The habit of rejoicing in the prospect of immortality is a most powerful and generous incentive to a course of virtue and religious obedience. Exclude joy from religion and religious hopes, and what will remain to animate to true obedience? Interest, no doubt, and reason, recommend obedience: but what is that *interest* in which there is nothing pleasing and delightful? And would not *reason*, itself, be an insipid guide, if not enlightened by the promises of that Celestial Wisdom, *whose ways are ways of pleasantness, and all whose paths are peace?* It is, then, the *rejoicing hope of the glory of God* that renders the *yoke easy* and the *burden light* to his faithful servants. *The joy of the Lord* (says the Prophet Nehemiah) *is the strength of the righteous*. It animates his zeal in the service of his God. It accelerates his progress, and maintains his perseverance in a virtuous course. It renders him *faithful unto the death*, in the persuasion that he shall obtain the *crown of life*

Finally,

Finally,—The habit of rejoicing in the prospect of immortality will have a happy influence upon the general frame and tenour of our minds in all our relations, connexions, and duties. It will sweeten our tempers, correct our peevish humours, form in us a benevolent and charitable spirit, and carry us on, with a cheerful tranquillity, to the end of our course.

Let us then cultivate, through the aids of Divine Grace, this excellent habit, and be on our guard against whatever may tend to interrupt its exercise. Thus shall we enjoy, here below, some anticipation of the celestial country after which we aspire, prepare ourselves more and more for an *inheritance with the saints in light*, adorn the religion we profess to believe, and, after having tasted the pleasures of hope, be admitted to those of full enjoyment, in the presence of Him, with *whom there is fullness of joy and pleasures for evermore.*

DISCOURSE VII.

On SELF-LOVE.

2 TIMOTHY, iii. 1, 2.

THIS KNOW ALSO, THAT IN THE LAST
DAYS PERILOUS TIMES SHALL COME;
FOR MEN SHALL BE LOVERS OF THEIR
OWN SELVES.

AT first sight, it may appear singular to see
an affection, which is universal in the
human heart, and which several eminent
moralists have been pleased to consider as the
only principle and spring of all our actions,
placed by St. Paul in a list of the most per-
nicious vices that disgrace humanity. *Self-*
love is so placed in the words before us. It is
even set at the head of the list; and it would

not, perhaps, be difficult to shew, that it is placed there as the original source of all the enormities which follow : for it is not to be supposed, that men will violate the principles of religion, the dictates of conscience, the laws of order and virtue, without some motive of a selfish kind, some prospect, however delusive, of interest or pleasure.

In the words of our text, St. Paul forewarns his favourite disciple of a remarkable decline of piety and virtue, which was unhappily to take place, even in the times of the Gospel, which are here denoted by the *last days*, a phrase frequently used in this sense by the sacred writers. It is generally supposed, that the Apostle has in view the great alteration that was made in the face of the Christian Church, between the reigns of *Nero* and *Trajan* ; during which period, it is well known, that many professors of the Gospel dishonoured the sacred name they bore, by an odious apostasy, both from the purity of the Christian faith, and the sanctity of Christian morals.

It were ardently to be wished that this reproach could only be cast upon the times of
Nero

Nero and Trajan! But where shall we find a period in which the workings of an irregular self-love have not rendered the *times*, more or less, *perilous*, nay, pernicious both to the repose of individuals, and to the public tranquillity? And yet how little are we on our guard against the love of ourselves? How little are we sensible of the degree of guilt with which it may become chargeable, and of the enormities to which it may imperceptibly lead? Regarding self-love in general as an innocent, and even a necessary principle, how rarely do we distinguish between its lawful indulgence and its irregular impulsions—between its uses and its abuses! And how little are we aware, that from this principle, ill-understood, and blindly followed, all our disorders and all our transgressions derive their origin.

It is but too palpable, that the workings of an irregular self-love are more or less to be found in every individual. If its enormities are manifest in egregious transgressors, its influence will sometimes delude even good minds, in a certain degree, and imperceptibly mingling itself with sentiments and actions
which

which are essentially good, it will corrupt, more or less, the purity of our principles and motives, and wound the integrity of the moral and religious character in a variety of ways. This consideration should lead us to lend a proper attention to a subject in which we are all intimately concerned, and in the discussion of which we shall successively consider,

I. The nature of a regular self-love, and the principles to which it must be subordinate, in order to render its indulgence lawful:—

II. The abuses by which the love of ourselves degenerates into that criminal affection, which the Apostle condemns, as the symptom of *perilous times*:—

And, III. In what respects this vicious self-love renders the times, in which it prevails, truly *perilous*.

I. That there is a principle of self-love planted in the human breast, with which we are born, and which follows us habitually through the various scenes of enjoyment, suffering, and conduct, in which we are engaged, is no more to be denied than this self-evident truth, that the desire of happiness
is

is natural to man. The love of ourselves, considered in general as an instinctive desire of happiness, is neither virtuous nor vicious ; but it may become the one or the other, according to the views and principles by which it is directed. As it has for its object our preservation and subsistence, it is *necessary* ;—as it leads us to desire a certain portion of the external comforts and enjoyments of life, it is *innocent* ;—as it excites us to maintain a good reputation, and animates to many efforts and actions which are advantageous to society, it is *commendable*, and becomes almost *virtuous* ;—as it embraces that kind of happiness which religion exhibits, those sublime promises held forth in the Gospel to animate our perseverance in the paths of virtue, it is the truest wisdom : thus Moses looked to the *recompence of reward* *, and St. Paul *pressed forward to the mark for the prize of the high calling* †. In a word, the general principle of self-love, or the desire of happiness, is a natural principle ; and, when it is well directed in the choice of its particular objects, moderate in

* Heb. xi. 26.

† Phil. iii. 14.

its pursuits, and kept in a proper subordination to other principles of equal authority and superior dignity, which distinguish us as rational beings, Christians, and citizens, it contributes both to our own happiness and that of our fellow-creatures.

It must, however, be observed that *self love*, in the common acceptation of that word, (and it is in this sense that we here consider it,) is almost always used to express those desires and propensities, which have for their objects our preservation and sustenance, the enjoyment of elevation, rank, and opulence, and the attainment of what may be called the personal advantages and external comforts of life. Now, even in this point of view, the principle of self-love is both lawful and necessary. The great and bountiful Being, by whom we have been placed in this transitory state, permits us to employ a considerable degree of attention and care in providing for our subsistence, and even in rendering life agreeable, by a proper enjoyment of the good things which his providence either directly bestows, or has placed within the reach of human industry. He *openeth his hand liberally*,
K that

that his creatures may *be filled with good* *. He allows the pursuit of riches, honours, and even of those pleasures which may be derived, in such a rich variety and abundance, from a wise and temperate use of the gifts of his bounty, in the different conditions and relations of human life. But, at the same time, all these natural workings of self-love must be kept within their proper bounds:—what bounds? the bounds prescribed to them by our characters as *religious* and *sociable* beings. The Father of spirits has made *man* for nobler ends than those which come within the sphere even of an innocent and lawful self-love; and you must acknowledge, that a person, of whom we can say no more, than that he subsists, and enjoys rich abundance of all those things that can please his fancy, and gratify his external senses, exhibits to us a very mean and ignoble character, even though talents and genius embellished, more or less, his selfish career, and he were free from the reproach of enormous depravation and iniquity. To this depravation and iniquity, however,

* Psalm civ. 28.

an irregular and unrestrained love of ourselves naturally leads as we shall shew in the proper place.

There are, then, three great lines in the character and relations of *man*, which are designed to regulate and to keep in subordination the workings of self-love; and these are, the love of God, or true *religion*—the love of our neighbour, or true *benevolence*—and the love of the country or community to which we belong, *i. e.* true and genuine *patriotism*. In these three great relations, and the sentiments and duties which are connected with them, the true dignity, happiness, and glory of human nature properly consist; and if men were attentive to these relations, and to the solemn demands they have upon our sentiments and actions, then self-love (which is perpetually crying out, *Who will shew us any good?*) would be directed in its pursuits to the true sources of felicity. Then the irregular and unhappy excesses of a blind self-love would be restrained by enlightened views of true happiness and perfection, and the love of ourselves would be blended with the love of God, the love of order and virtue, the love of

our country, and the love of mankind. And then would cease those fatal abuses of a natural, innocent, and inextinguishable principle, which defeat the intention of that principle, and render it, according to the doctrine of the Apostle, the characteristic of *perilous* and unhappy times. We therefore proceed, in the

II^d head, to consider the abuses, by which the natural principle of self-love becomes irregular and criminal.—We have already observed that this affection, considered in a general point of view, is in itself neither virtuous nor vicious; but that it may become the one or the other, in a very high degree, according to the views and objects by which it is directed in the pursuit of happiness. Under the conduct of reason and religion it is an incentive to virtue and moral improvement, whose *ways are ways of pleasantness*, and all whose *paths are peace* *; but under the blind impulse of irregular passions and a deluded fancy, it leads to all the excesses of corruption and vice. In effect, how pernicious and irrational are the workings of self-love, when

* Prov. iii. 17.

it is not directed and influenced by the principles of religion and virtue? What a variety of appearances and modifications does it assume to delude and corrupt the mind? Its various forms are long become a subject of general complaint, and many, even of those who are chargeable with it themselves, are zealous and warm in censuring it in others.—Consider, for a moment, some of the principal forms which self-love assumes, when it becomes irregular, and then you will easily perceive, with what truth the *times*, in which it prevails, may be called *perilous*.

1. An innocent propensity to provide that portion of the good things of life, which is requisite for our subsistence, or a decent support in our respective stations, may become irregular and criminal by growing *excessive*. It then degenerates into an *avaricious* desire of *joining house to house* and *laying field to field**; and creates a multitude of imaginary wants, which the most anxious efforts of industry, and means often unfair and indelicate,

* Isaiah, v. 8.

are employed to satisfy. It bestows upon the acquisition of opulence a degree of merit which is disproportioned to its real importance, considered separately from its beneficent uses; and it is incompatible with a due and proper attention to acquisitions of a more momentous and excellent nature.—With this first form of an irregular self-love, this anxious love of gain, the most ignoble of all the passions, many are chargeable; and even some who make no small pretensions to religion and virtue: and there is scarcely any other passion whose indulgence is encouraged by so many specious pretexts, and whose deformity so many illusions are employed to conceal from those whom it degrades. The obligations of prudence, piety, nay, even of beneficence, (applauded but unpractised,) are often alleged to varnish the turpitude of the covetous man. Hence many professed Christians imagine, that they have *laid up their treasures in Heaven*, and their hearts also; when a more candid and intimate view of what passes within them would make it appear, that *they have made gold their hope*, and
say,

say, with a predominant affection to *fine gold, thou art my confidence* *. If we accustomed ourselves to examine, with impartiality, our inward feelings, and to compare our desires of worldly abundance with those which have for their object the culture of our minds, and the improvement of those religious and virtuous habits, that constitute the supreme felicity of rational and immortal beings, what would be the result of such an examination? Many would, alas! find, by a mortifying experience, that a groveling self-love had gained an unhappy ascendant in their hearts; and even good Christians, on such an examination, would be frequently alarmed at the undue share which the external goods of a transitory world have usurped in their affections.

2. But the desire of gain is only one of those forms, under which an irregular self-love deludes and degrades the mind. We observed, in our former head, that the pleasures of sense, and the external comforts and enjoyments of life, which soften the severity of

* Job, xxxi. 24.

serious pursuits, and are seasonable recreations in the intervals of duty, were innocent objects of a lawful self-love. But here, again, how does the blind impulse of an irregular self-love corrupt the sources of enjoyment? This is the case, when the love of pleasure degenerates into a low sensuality, or an effeminate luxury;—when, in the search after tranquillity and rest, men sink into an inglorious indolence and ease;—when temporary amusement degenerates into habitual dissipation and idleness, so that all improvement in knowledge and virtue is neglected, and all the higher faculties of the mind are debilitated and degraded by these ignoble pursuits. In such cases self-love becomes criminal and irregular in a high degree. It extinguishes a zeal for active virtue and public usefulness, and it perverts that natural desire of happiness, to which reason and religion offer such a sublime gratification, to objects of a frivolous nature, to pleasures that have neither solidity nor dignity, and which leave behind them dejection and languor.

3. It was observed, above, that an honest ambition, a desire of honours and elevation, was

was among the objects of a lawful self-love : and this ambition, under the influence and direction of reason and religion, is not only innocent, but may be highly and extensively useful. But when it is separated from these guides, and abandoned to the impulse of blind and tumultuous passions, how immoderate does it become ? How unjust and irregular in all its workings and pursuits ? It sees nothing too high for its pretensions. It measures its claims by presumption instead of merit. It engenders hatred, envy, perfidy, and vengeance ; and disdains no means that can accomplish its purposes.

After considering a corrupt self-love in its erroneous pursuits of happiness, let us consider it in another point of view, in which its influence and workings are perhaps still more universal, and not less pernicious and fatal ; I mean, in the delusion it produces in the minds of many with respect to their *real* characters and the state of their minds. While they are keenly attentive and severe in judging of others, it renders them negligent in examining themselves. It makes them take
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for granted the goodness of their characters, without any careful or impartial inquiry into the true state of their hearts, the nature of their prevailing passions, the secret motives of their actions, and the real ends and purposes they pursue in the conduct of life. What instances of delusion do we meet with here? A varnish of innocence is given to vice, and even palpable defects are converted into virtues. Avarice becomes prudent œconomy, sensuality a liberal enjoyment of the comforts of life, prodigality a generous beneficence, indolence and idleness a harmless relaxation. And even where virtues are really possessed, the delusions of self-love lead men to exaggerate their merit, to augment their number, and to imprint a character of superiority and perfection on all their good qualities, talents, and advantages.

It would be endless to follow the dangerous principle of *selfishness* through all the delusions to which it gives rise. We shall confine our observations on its deplorable effects to what the Apostle says of such a spirit, when it gains ground and becomes prevalent; and,

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as we proposed in our *third head*, shew in what sense it may be considered as the mark of *perilous times*.

III. The original word, which is rendered in our version by the word *perilous*, has two significations, which are nearly related, and are both applicable to those unhappy times in which men are *lovers of themselves*. It signifies *difficult* times, and *dangerous* times; and you will easily perceive in what sense the times, in which an irregular self-love generally prevails, are both difficult and dangerous.

I. Such times are *difficult*. They are embarrassing to righteous and good men in all the ranks and stations of human life. They, whose zeal for the advancement of religion and the public good is warm and active, find in such times peculiar difficulties. They are discouraged from forming many useful and salutary plans, by the oppositions which they have to encounter in the avarice of some, and the envy or ambition of others. They must struggle, in every generous and useful measure they propose, against *selfishness*, in a great variety

riety of forms; and, in a multitude of cases, in which the public good is palpably and essentially concerned, it requires more than human power to defeat the perfidious stratagems or the open efforts of that corrupt and pernicious principle.

Such times are also, in the more contracted sphere of private life, difficult and embarrassing to every individual. Where is the man of piety, wisdom, and integrity, who has not much to suffer from the selfish humours and prejudices of his neighbours; nay, even of his *friends*, if *lovers of themselves* can deserve that title? Does not his inflexible virtue often pass for obstinacy, in their estimation; his piety for enthusiasm, his counsels for insults, his reasons for prejudices, when they happen to oppose the irregular workings of an arrogant and presumptuous self-love? Is it not in the times when this vicious principle prevails, that the Christian is obliged to take up the cross of his suffering Master, and to follow the laws of his Gospel and the dictates of his own conscience, through much opposition and various difficulties?

But

But if this irregular self-love renders the times difficult, it renders them also *dangerous*, highly so to our best and most important interests, spiritual and temporal, private and public.

The selfish spirit, as it has been already described, is dangerous to the spirit and interests of religion;—it is evidently adapted to retard its progress, nay even to extinguish its sacred flame in the heart of man. *Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.* This is the decision of our Blessed Lord, and it is confirmed by daily observation. How can a heart, contracted by avarice, or inflamed with ambition, or polluted by sensuality, or wholly occupied with worldly enjoyments and cares, raise its degraded faculties and affections to the contemplation of the greatest and best of Beings, taste the serene and rational delights of communion with him, and elevate its views to the transporting prospect of a happy immortality? How can a soul, deluded by self-confidence and presumption, perceive its transgressions and failings, be sensible of its remaining corruption, and come, with the candid humility of the publican, to the Foun-

tain of mercy, to obtain that peace that passeth understanding? How can a narrow and a selfish spirit permit the progress of active virtue and religious obedience, of *the things that are true, pure, honest, and praise-worthy*, in the human heart?

And this ignoble spirit must be, of consequence, pernicious to the interests of religion and its advancement in the world. And, accordingly, we see how the interests of religion are promoted in these perilous times. There is no period of the world, in which God has not faithful servants and *labourers* in his *vineyard*; but against what an enormous mass of corruption are they not obliged to labour? They find in their way, the tenets of infidelity and scepticism, fondly adopted by vicious passions, or by the pride of pretended science, both of which they nourish and flatter: but this is not all—for, even among the professors of Christianity, they have to encounter an inordinate love of the world, and the selfish pursuit of its pleasures and advantages, which produce the most unhappy effects on true religious zeal. Hence that cold indifference about religion, that in-
attention

attention to its awful and eternal importance, that want of zeal for its propagation and interests, which gain ground from day to day, and are as unaccountable as they are afflicting. Unaccountable and afflicting they must indeed be, to those who know the salutary influence of true religion on human happiness, in all the ranks, orders, and circumstances even of a present world. It would seem scarcely possible, that those who are acquainted with the nature, and who believe the truths and promises of this divine religion, should be coldly affected towards it; but the greatest contradictions become possible, when selfish and sensual passions have gained an ascendant in the mind.

2. From the dangerous tendency of a prevailing selfishness to extinguish the vital spirit of religion, we must be persuaded of its dangerous, nay, its fatal influence on the happiness and prosperity of a country. It is evident, that the spirit of true religion, which nourishes in the soul the love of mankind, as well as the love of God, and renders men attentive to all their relations, private and public, and to the duties they require, must
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be the natural source and the best support of public felicity. This is that *righteousness* which *exalteth a nation*, renders its rulers wise and respectable, and its inhabitants obedient, united, and happy. It is evident, on the contrary, that a selfish spirit extinguishes a generous zeal for the public good, and confines the whole attention of men to the narrow circle of their private interest, and the low sphere of their sensual pleasures and enjoyments.—But this is not all: for this selfish spirit, which is avaritious, contentious, assuming, and ambitious, produces, as its natural fruits, that disunion, that opposition of interests, those jealousies and factions, those secret frauds, and that low venality, that sap the foundations of public order and national felicity.

Let these considerations, therefore, engage us to watch over our own hearts; for, in consequence of the principle which we have been now describing, they may become *deceitful*, deceived, and even *desperately wicked* *. Let us look with a cautious eye of reflexion

* Jerem. xvii. 9.

to the motions and suggestions of that principle, which, in its regular application, is so essential to our happiness, but under the guidance of corruption and passions, is so fatal to our true and eternal interests. Let us direct this principle by the dictates of reason, enlighten it by the word of unerring truth, submit it to the purifying influence of Divine Grace, and blend its effusions with the love of God and of mankind, with the love of order and virtue. Thus, and thus only, can self-love answer its true destination, and attain its noblest object, which is the improvement of our nature in what constitutes its real perfection and felicity. By blending itself with that charity, which *seeketh not its own*, it will obtain *its own*, in the most effectual manner: by sacrificing its will to the will of God, it will gain, beyond expression, instead of losing; by renouncing the advantages of the world, it will often obtain the most precious treasure; and by abstaining, on the proper occasions, from its pleasures, it will both augment and ennoble the sources of its enjoyment. Thus purified in its principle, and directed in its exercise, self-love will become

one with the love of God and the love of mankind;—and when *faith* shall be lost in *sight* and *hope* in *enjoyment*, it will remain in a delightful alliance with charity, which *never fails*;—with that charity which is the *end of the commandment*, the common bond of union and source of felicity to all rational and moral beings, under the immortal empire of *Him, whose essence is Love.*

DISCOURSE VIII.

On the LOVE of GOD, as it dispels or modifies
the FEARS of the CHRISTIAN.

I JOHN, iv. 18.

THERE IS NO FEAR IN LOVE: BUT
PERFECT LOVE CASTETH OUT FEAR;
BECAUSE FEAR HATH TORMENT: HE
THAT FEARETH IS NOT MADE PERFECT
IN LOVE.

FEAR is the most disquieting and painful
of all the passions: and of all the different
kinds of fear, none is so unsupportable, when
it is carried to a high degree, as that which
has for its objects the justice of God, and the
awful moment when death places man before
a future tribunal. Hence it is, that we find

in the records of all ages and nations, anxious efforts perpetually employed to get rid of this fear, and to render the Judge of the world propitious. Hence the gloomy, and, sometimes, cruel inventions of superstition. Hence those exclamations, proceeding from the terrors of conscience; *Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and present myself before the most high God? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings? Shall I give him my first-born for my transgressions, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?*—Such, in a state of tormenting perplexity, were the fruitless exclamations of ignorance and superstition; and sinful man was still held in the bondage of terror. Among the precepts of Pagan wisdom we find, sometimes, splendid views of the excellence of virtue, but no sure foundation of tranquillity and hope for the alarmed conscience, when its laws had been transgressed. The Sage of the Stoics, (an ideal sort of being,) who was supposed to be above the infirmities of humanity, was, indeed, proudly considered as the favourite of Heaven; but dark and desperate was the prospect of those who had not attained to the pretended per-

fection of this sublime but visionary model. Thus we see the insufficiency of unassisted philosophy for the consolation of weak and sinful man, exposed to the remorse and terrors of conscience; and, above all, the necessity of a divine Revelation, in which God, *reconciling the world to himself*, by a positive dispensation of remission and mercy, should dispel the fears of penitent offenders. This dispensation was, in effect, manifested, in all the attracting forms of Divine love and benignity, to a sinful world by the Son of God. Peace on earth and good-will to men were announced, at his birth, confirmed by his ministry, and ratified by his cross. And it is upon this foundation that every true Christian may adopt the language of the Apostle in our text, and say, with humble, and also with joyful confidence, *There is no fear in love; perfect love casteth out fear.*

In the farther illustration of this passage, we shall, in the *first place*, examine what that love is, to which such an eminent privilege is here assigned. *Secondly*, We shall consider the nature and extent of this privilege, and

shew how, and in what respects, *love* is adapted to cast out *fear*.

I. If we attend to the tenour of the Apostle's reasoning in this chapter, we shall be naturally led to understand here, by the word *love*, our love to the Supreme Being, which is most affectingly described through the whole of this Epistle, both in the motives which excite and nourish it, and the fruits which essentially proceed from it. This is evident from the verse which immediately follows our text, where the Apostle says, *We love him, because he first loved us.*

It is farther observable, that it is not merely love but *perfect* love, which the Apostle represents as *casting out fear*. But let not the sincere and humble mind be discouraged, when it sees *perfection* laid down as the character of that love to which such a precious and happy influence is attributed in our text. Perfection, strictly speaking, is not attainable in the exercise of any virtue in a present state, and therefore it is love in a high degree of improvement, vigour, and perseverance, that the Apostle has in view in the words before

us. If, in order to remove our fears, and to render us acceptable in the eye of God, an absolute perfection in love were required, who could hope for the favour of Him, *in whose sight* (as the Psalmist sublimely expresses it) *the heavens are not pure, and who charges, even, his angels* with imperfection and *folly*? It is, accordingly, remarkable, that the term *perfection* is of the same import with *sincerity* in innumerable passages of the sacred writings; and it is this *sincerity* which is the vital principle of religion, and the great bond of communion between imperfect man and his merciful Creator. It is also the essential character of sincerity to make such a progressive improvement in every virtue, as tends really towards perfection, and will be crowned with it at the proper season. It supposes that, according to our respective means and capacities, we are zealous in cultivating, through grace, those sentiments of veneration and love, which are due to the greatest and best of Beings, that fervent gratitude which his paternal goodness and mercy are so adapted to excite, that humble and joyful

confidence in his precious promises, which animates love, and produces, as its proper fruits, resignation to his will, and a chearful obedience to his holy and righteous laws.—

This is that love of God which is called *perfect* by the Apostle; because, when it is exercised with that sincerity which implies assiduous culture and improvement, it acquires all that strength and perfection of which it is susceptible in this state of infancy and trial.

Now, it is the privilege of perfect love, thus defined, to *cast out fear*; and the precise nature and extent of its happy influence in this respect, we come now to consider, in the *second* and principle head of this Discourse.

II. *There is no fear in love, saith St. John; —perfect love casteth out fear.* At first sight, this affirmation seems to contradict several passages of Scripture, in which fear is represented as a religious affection, as *the beginning of wisdom*; as a salutary principle of piety and obedience; and in which, consequently, *that man is pronounced blessed, who feareth always.* But this seeming contradiction will entirely vanish, when we consider with attention,

tion, what *kind* of fear that is, which love *casteth out*; and how far the influence of love extends in this respect.

1. The *fear of God* is often used in the Sacred Writings to express the sentiments of profound respect and awe, which are due to the Supreme Being, considered as the righteous Lord and Governor of the universe; and it is not surely this pious affection, which the love of Him, who is the *greatest*, as well as the *best* of Beings, is adapted to extinguish, or even to diminish, in the mind of man. Christians, indeed, are raised, by redemption and grace, to the happy title and privileges of the children of God; but do they cease, on that account, to be the moral subjects of his awful empire? While they love him as a *Father*, are they under no obligation to revere him as a *Judge*? This can never be the case with true Christians. Love and awe are congenial sentiments, when grandeur and goodness, authority and mercy are united in their object: and while, in the contemplation of the Divine goodness, the Christian calls out, with an effusion of love, *O be joyful in the Lord, all ye lands*, he will
say,

say, at the same time, in his views of the sanctity and majesty of God, *Who would not fear thee, O King of Nations?* Certainly, my brethren, a profound veneration for that Great Being, whose nature is sanctity and order, and of whose throne righteousness is the eternal foundation, is the basis of all true religion. It is only after having revered him as the Judge of the world, that we can love him truly as the merciful Father and Saviour of men. It is the solemn majesty of the tribunal of justice, that adds a peculiar lustre to the mild glory of the throne of grace, and blends, in such a manner, pious awe with reviving gratitude and hope, as to make the good man both tremble and rejoice in the presence of his God.—Hence the Sacred Writers understand, by the fear of God, piety in general, or, in other words, that reverential fear of the best of Beings, which is a powerful, and even an ingenuous incentive, to universal obedience. It cannot, therefore, be this kind of fear, which *love casteth out*.

2. But there is another kind of fear, the consideration of which will lead us to the precise

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cise meaning of the Apostle in our text ; and this is the *painful* dread of the justice of God, and of the punishment it reserves for the unrighteous in an awful futurity. This fear, when excited only by the anguish and despair of a wounded conscience, which *dreads* the punishment without *revering* the judge, is certainly incompatible with the love of God, which is characterised by St. John in the verse preceding our text, as inspiring *boldness in the day of judgment* ; by which is meant, that it encourages the Christian to behold the future tribunal of his Saviour with an humble and ingenuous confidence, arising from the promises which are made to faith *working by love* and sincere obedience. The sentiment opposite to this ingenuous and filial confidence is a *servile* fear, in its various characters of anxious diffidence, terror, and despair, arising from views of the justice of God, which are not softened by a sense of his goodness or hope in his mercy. This, then, is the kind of fear from which sincere and predominant love preserves or delivers the true Christian.

But is it then true, you may ask, that this prevalent love does, or ought to, deliver even
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the good man, beset as he is with infirmities, and not always secured against actual transgressions, from all fear of the Divine justice, from *all* painful apprehensions of a judgment to come?—In answer to this question, we shall proceed to consider, how far the love of God may be said to modify this fear, and thus we shall be able to form an accurate idea of the extent of its efficacy in this respect. And here we may observe that in the fear of Divine justice there are different *degrees*; and all these degrees are not inconsistent with sincere love, nor are they entirely excluded by it, as you may conclude from what has been already hinted on this subject. To frail, sinful man (and where is the man that sinneth not?) the prospect of a judgment to come, and the consideration of the great and important interests which may be forfeited in an eternal world, are proper to excite serious apprehension, and, whether from infirmity or humility, to temper hope with a certain mixture of pious anxiety. Even the good man, when he compares his manifold omissions and failings with the sanctity of the divine laws and the grandeur of his future destination, will sometimes

times have his dark and painful moments; nor will even the humble consciousness of his general perseverance in a virtuous course always bring immediate relief. He judges himself with more severity than he will be judged by his God, and, though really in a state of acceptance with his Heavenly Father, he will say with the Psalmist, *Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord; for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.* But all these anxieties are of a generous kind: they are entirely consistent with the sincere and ardent love of God, if not connected with it; and it is one of the essential characters of the true Christian, that *he works out his own salvation with fear and trembling.* It is here that we may say, *Blessed is the man that feareth always!* that is, who is piously anxious about his great interests in a future and eternal world, and who knows, from the equity of God's moral government, that as a man *sows*, so also *shall he reap.* The fear of Divine justice, in this degree, is the natural fruit of true piety, and is a salutary guard to the good man. It excites vigilance and circumspection; it animates repentance; and it even co-operates with the love of God,

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in ensuring a sincere and persevering obedience.

But there is a degree of this fear which is totally incompatible with the love of God. This takes place when the fear of Divine justice is *extreme*; when it degenerates into terror; when it covers the paternal aspect of the Father of Mercies from the view of the alarmed and desponding offender, and presents only to his wounded spirit the laws and the tribunal of the righteous Judge. It is this degree of fear, this servile terror, that the Apostle has evidently in view, when he says in our text, that *fear bath torment*; that is, it is the sting of remorse accompanied with despair. It is in this degree, so long as it continues, that fear is incompatible with love, and can never produce a rational or ingenuous service. The one must necessarily destroy the other. Servile terror excludes love. Perfect or sincere love casteth out servile terror, and substitutes in its place that prudent apprehension, that ingenuous fear, which will never remove confidence in God's mercy, nor *boldness* and humble hope in the day of judgment.

Thus

Thus you see, that the love of God never excludes totally, that fear of Divine justice which may lead to repentance; it only banishes that fear which is attended with remorse and torment, without the salutary fruits of conversion and obedience.

It will be worthy of our attention to consider, on this interesting subject, *how* and to what *extent* the love of God produces this happy effect, and the different degrees in which its efficacy, in *casting out fear*, is displayed. It is manifest that love produces this salutary effect, in greater or less degrees according to the measure of its improvement and progress in the heart of the true Christian; and victory over tormenting fear is only total and complete, when love is *perfect*, that is, sincere and predominant. What is meant by this general observation, may be illustrated by the following cases and characters, taken from human life.

1. The reclaimed transgressor, who has but recently considered his evil ways, and *turned his feet to the Divine testimonies*, will (bating peculiar circumstances or succours) be *less* completely delivered from painful fear, *than* the
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the servant of God, who has been long confirmed in virtuous habits, increasing in love, and persevering in a course of obedience. More especially if he has been an atrocious offender, the danger he has escaped still alarms him; he trembles still, more or less, at a reflexion on the punishment his iniquities have deserved; and, when he considers the sanctity of that God whom he has now chosen to serve, his remaining corruption and infirmities will sometimes excite anxious feelings. Nevertheless, the sources of comfort which dispel tormenting fear are at hand. His views of the Divine mercy, and his consciousness of the grateful sentiments which this mercy excites in his heart, will gradually deliver him, more and more, from that fear which is accompanied with torment, and increase his confidence in the *Rock of his salvation*.

2. But where is the man, however confirmed both in his principles and practice, who may not, in a particular instance, fall from his steadfastness before the power of temptation? And if, at the same time, he fell from his love, his condition would be deplorable.

able. But this will not be the case of the advanced Christian, who, by assiduous culture and the aids of grace, has carried his love of the best of Beings to as high a measure of improvement as is attainable in this imperfect state. When he falls from his steadfastness, it is the love of his Saviour and his God that will effect his recovery. It will melt his heart into a generous compunction at the view of offended goodness; it will rise from compunction to new efforts of zeal and ardour in his virtuous course, and thus restoring the servant of God to the paths of duty, will restore him, at the same time, to the *joy of his salvation*.—Cast your eye on St. Peter when he denied his Master; it was indeed a dreadful moment, but how did this dreadful moment affect him? His conscience, no doubt, reported to him with a faithful severity the enormity and aggravations of his crime; but it was the *love* of his Master, more than the *justice* of his God, that was his inexpressible tormentor. He felt, no doubt, the pangs of remorse; but the anguish of fear seems to have been totally absorbed in the sorrows of love. *He went out and wept*
M *bitterly;*

bitterly; for he who knoweth all things knew that he loved him.

It is certain that the love of God, when in a high degree of improvement, as it is the noblest, will be also the predominant, if not the sole principle of obedience to the good man in the general tenor of his life; the mean of his recovery when he fails in duty, and the source of his submission and comfort in the day of trial and adversity. In this happy state of improvement, it will *cast out* every kind of fear that *brings torment*, and only leave in the heart of the Christian the filial and ingenuous fear of offending the celestial Father whom he loves. And in this high degree of improvement, what a pleasing state of mind does it produce? With what humble but serene confidence will it encourage the good man to look up to his God for protection and support? To what signal efforts of active obedience in the duties of life, and of patience and submission in its calamities and trials, will it not animate the true Christian? From St. Paul in affliction and chains, with the terrors of death and martyrdom before him, it drew forth those effusions

sions of triumphant hope; *I am persuaded, that neither life nor death, principalities nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor things present nor things to come, nor any other creature, shall separate me from the love of God, which is in Jesus Christ my Lord.*

You see, from the whole of this Discourse, how religion, or the love of God, which is its essential and leading principle, reduces to perfect harmony affections which are dissimilar and, in appearance, discordant. Under its influence and guidance, love is reconcilable with fear; confidence, with caution; and the pleasing hope of immortality, with a salutary anxiety about our future and eternal interests. It combines and blends these different affections and qualities, so as to make them constitute precisely that moral character and temper of mind, which is suited to our present state of imperfection and trial; and thus they become the different parts of a *whole*, in which resides the true harmony of virtue. It is equally evident, that contradiction and inconsistency accompany and degrade those natural affections which were implanted in us for useful purposes, when

they are not under the guidance of reason and religious principle. Among these *fear*, which was designed to be a preservative against evil and suffering, may serve as an example. How fatally is it misplaced in a multitude of cases? More especially, how notoriously is it perverted in the minds of those, who dread the displeasure of men, while they insult and violate, without apprehension or terror, the laws and majesty of God; and of many who tremble at the prospect of death, while they go on fearless in the ways of folly and vice, which alone can render death terrible?

Let religion then be our sacred guide in the exercise of our affections and in the conduct of life. Let us, by an habitual contemplation of the Divine perfections in nature, providence, and the dispensation of grace, nourish that *love* of the best of Beings, which comprehends in its nature and in its fruits every thing that can establish order in our minds, rectitude in our conduct, and hope in our end. When the review of our transgressions disturbs our peace; when the consciousness of our infirmities diminishes our

confidence, and the prospect of death opening before us an awful eternity, alarms our apprehensions, let us look up to him, whose essence is love, and *who dwelleth in love!* Then if our return of love to him, however imperfect, be humble and sincere, our peace shall be established, our confidence restored, and our apprehensions dispelled. Though all true Christians may not possess a degree of confidence so complete and triumphant as that which St. Paul derived from the love of God in its highest improvement, they shall, nevertheless, enjoy that humble and comfortable *hope* which renders fear filial and ingenuous, and, blending it with love in a growing progress, will render it the principle of a virtuous life here, and the anticipation of a happy and a glorious life hereafter.

But these blessings are unknown to obstinate and habitual transgressors, who brave the justice of God, and are unaffected by his goodness and mercy; for *there* is no lasting *peace* or assurance to the wicked. Nor can the noble privilege that is annexed by St. John to the love of God, in the words before us, be applied to those whose religious profession is

little animated by this divine principle. If neither profound veneration nor grateful love accompany their external attachment to the service of the greatest and best of Beings ; if they have little taste for the rational and elevated pleasure, which the contemplation of his perfections and government is so adapted to excite ; if they do not found their chief felicity on his precious and transporting promises, and derive from them power and encouragement, to obey his commandments with a salutary mixture of pious joy and godly fear, can they be said to possess that *love that casteth out servile terror, and inspires boldness in the day of judgment* ? No, certainly ; the barren profession of Christianity is no security against the terrors of conscience, because by such a profession the ultimate end of that divine Religion is not answered : for its Blessed Author gave himself up for us, not only that he might redeem us from our iniquities, but also that he might purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works. He came to restore a fallen and corrupt nature to the love of order, and to the practice of those virtues which confirm our peace with God here, and lay the
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foundations of an endless progress in moral perfection and felicity hereafter.—Happy, then, those who hear his voice, obey his laws, and take refuge in his mercy ! No servile terror shall trouble their tranquillity ; nor shall the approach of death and judgment be able to remove their confidence.—*The mountains may depart, and the hills may be removed, but the loving-kindness and the promises of the Lord shall remain, and they that do the will of God shall endure for ever. Even in the valley of the shadow of death they shall be enabled to say, with an humble magnanimity and a triumphant hope, I have set the Lord always before me ; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.*

20-9-45

DISCOURSE IX.

ON the MIXTURE of PROSPERITY and
ADVERSITY in the STATE of MAN.

ECCLESIASTES, vii. 14.

IN THE DAY OF PROSPERITY REJOICE, BE
JOYFUL; BUT IN THE DAY OF ADVER-
SITY CONSIDER: GOD ALSO HATH SET
THE ONE OVER AGAINST THE OTHER,
TO THE END THAT MAN SHOULD FIND
NOTHING AFTER HIM.

IT is both the misfortune and the reproach
of a great part of mankind, that they live
without reflexion; and surely the richest
sources of wisdom and comfort are lost to
those who live so. *You see many things*, (said
the prophet Ifaiah to the people of Judah,)
but

but ye observe not *. Some, in a deep oblivion of their dependance, seldom or never raise their thoughts to the Supreme Cause of the events which strike or affect them : others, if they entertain a general notion of the power and superintendance of the Invisible Being who sends good and permits evil, give little attention to the wise purposes of his various dispensations ; and too few reflect upon the duties and obligations to which Divine Providence calls them, by the perpetual mixture of good and evil which marks the present state of their existence.

It was to correct this pernicious and criminal indolence that Solomon exhorted the men of his time to study the ways of Providence, in order to perceive the wisdom, and to improve the instructive voice of its dispensations. *Consider*, says he in the verse preceding our text, *the work of God ; for who can make that straight which he hath made crooked ?* a proverbial expression, designed to shew that all his ways are wise. It is as if Solomon had said, What blind man may consider as

* Isaiah, xlii. 20.

crooked and perverse, is, in reality, wise and right; what he may call *fate* or chance, is *wise direction*; what to him appears *disorder*, may be *harmony* not understood*; what he looks upon as *evil*, may be really such in the present moment, but in the issue be productive of eternal good.—Upon the whole, all things are wisely permitted, directed, and arranged under the universal empire of God's eternal providence: and it is the duty of man to *observe* this, and to think, feel, and act accordingly. This is the sense and spirit of the words of our text, in which we find three things to consider and illustrate: 1st, The matter of fact, that prosperity and adversity are associated, *placed the one over against the other* in the life of man, and that God is the author of this arrangement:—2dly, The wisdom of this arrangement:—3dly, The line of conduct pointed out to us by this mixture of natural good and evil, if we would act conformably to the intention of Divine Providence. *In the day of prosperity be joyful; in the day of adversity consider.*

* See Pope's Essay on Man.

1. We are then, first, to consider the matter of fact ; and this indeed is incontestable. Generally speaking, the life of every man is a mixed state of good and evil, of days of enjoyment and days of trouble. There is nothing permanent in the state through which we are passing. Elevation, riches, pleasures, reputation, strength, beauty, all that we possess, all the external and accidental circumstances of our present existence, are either precarious with respect to their duration, and may be taken from us in a moment, or are susceptible of great alterations and changes. Sometimes the objects of enjoyment are taken from us ; and it frequently happens, that even when they are continued, we lose a taste for them, and become incapable of enjoying them with comfort. Take a general view of the various scenes of human life ! How is it disturbed by a multitude of unforeseen and inevitable revolutions, which dissolve families, disperse individuals, and turn opulence and joy into distress and sorrow ? The healthiest constitutions, the most shining reputations, the most solid fortunes, and the purest domestic comforts, are subject to painful vicissitudes.

tudes. They sometimes decline gradually, and sometimes pass rapidly from one extreme to another, as a serene sky is suddenly overcast, by a rising storm, with clouds and darkness.

On the other hand, scenes of adversity and distress are often followed by prosperous days. At the moment when a favourable change is little expected, the storm ceases, the clouds are dispersed, and the despairing mariner enters, with pleasure and surprise, into the desired harbour. Thus, in the diversified scene of human life, if there is *a time to weep*, there is also *a time to rejoice*. Many favourable changes and unexpected deliverances, after sorrow endured in the night season, bring comfort and joy in the morning. *Many, saith the Psalmist, are the afflictions of the righteous ; but the Lord brings deliverance, and so redeemeth the soul of his servants, that none of them that trust in him shall be desolate.*

It may be farther observed here, not only that there are seasons of *prosperity* and *adversity* which succeed each other, but that, in every state, good is, more or less, mixed with evil, and evil with good : they are seldom or never
entirely

entirely separated ; but, on the contrary, they are very frequently produced or occasioned the one by the other. The most brilliant prosperity is not exempted from vexations and pains ; it gives rise to a multitude of imaginary wants and anxious cares, to temptations, illusions, and vices which trouble its smooth current. The evil day is often tempered and alleviated by rays of hope that pierce its gloom, or by some gracious compensations that soothe and console the dejected sufferer. It excites to industry, prudence, and virtuous effort, which diminish its bitterness and produce a certain degree of self-enjoyment and tranquillity. We might enumerate, in an ample detail, the cases in which this singular mixture of good and evil is palpable, where they exist together, and are placed *the one over against the other* ; but your own observation and experience render this unnecessary.

2. Now this constitution of things, this mixture of good and evil, in the present state of man, is the providential arrangement of God ; and it is this truth, expressly declared by Solomon in the words of our text, that

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we proceed to confider. To regard this mixture of good and evil as the production of *chance*, is the fenfelefs jargon of the Epicurean, who, under a word void of meaning, conceals his ignorance of the true caufes of things, and of the Supreme Wifdom which prefides over them. Equally abfurd is it to attribute thefe events to blind *fate*, to an endlefs concatenation of fecond caufes, without beginning or end; which flow from each other, and, by an *unmeaning* and invincible neceffity, produce the ever-varying fcenes and circumftances of human life. This account of things is as unphilofophical and extravagant, as it is impious. It fupposes a feries or chain of effects, without any original caufe or ultimate end; which, in other words, is a chain *fufpended* upon *nothing*; and it represents the univerfe as an eternal chaos of confufion. It is an insult upon common fenfe, human liberty, and human nature; and haplefs, beyond expreffion, would be the fate of man, if, amidft the days of forrow and pain, which fo often embitter his prefent exiftence, this gloomy fyftem were his only refuge for inftruction and comfort!

Nor

Nor do they judge aright *of things*, who consider prosperity as depending only on our dexterity and efforts, and adversity as merely the effect of our levity and imprudence. For this general rule has many exceptions, and *the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong*. There are many events, both prosperous and adverse, which are totally independent on human prudence and human power; and with respect to which it may be said, that *promotion cometh neither from the east nor from the west, but God is the Judge, who putteth down one and setteth up another*. Nay, all events, good or evil, even those which proceed immediately from visible causes and human agency, depend on the laws and direction of Him, who, without wounding the liberty of beings, whom he has formed rational and free agents, presides, nevertheless, with a superintending influence over all the motions both of matter and mind throughout the universe. *The Lord reigns*; and it is only from this sublime truth that man can derive the purest enjoyment in the day of prosperity, and the most soothing consolation
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and firmness of mind in the dark moments of affliction and trial.

God, then, is the Supreme disposer of our lot and condition in human life. The day of prosperity and the day of adversity proceed from him. He *has placed the one over against the other ; i. e.* he has blended a portion of evil with good in the present transitory state of man.——But why such an arrangement, may some say? Why this perpetual mixture of pain and pleasure, of suffering and enjoyment, in the life of man? Had we no other answer to give to such questions, than the avowal of our ignorance, we should not be ashamed; for short and limited are the views of man, and immense is the plan of God's eternal government. More especially, when such questions are proposed by impatient mortals, with a spirit of presumption and discontent, they must be satisfied with such an answer as this: "*The ways of God are not your ways; nor does it belong to man, who is but of yesterday, to comprehend, in this infancy of his existence, all the purposes of God in a*
" scheme

“ scheme of things, which embraces not only
 “ the present, but the future, in an endless
 “ duration.—It is enough for you to know,
 “ that the *ways*, which you do not under-
 “ stand, are the *ways of God*, and shall
 “ therefore shine forth in all the fulness of
 “ their wisdom and goodness at the proper
 “ season.”——But notwithstanding the limits
 assigned at present to our observation and
 knowledge of the *ways of God*, we may
 discern luminous characters of their justice,
 wisdom, and also of their goodness, even in
 many of those painful events, which ignorance
 and impatience rashly consider as defects in
 the divine government: and it will be easy,
 both to explain and justify the affirmation
 of Solomon in our text, that God has mingled
 days of prosperity with days of adversity in
 human life, *to THE END that man should find*
nothing after him. This we proceed now to
 consider in our second head.

II. These words are susceptible of different
 interpretations, which all convey wise and
 useful instruction. By the phrase, *that man*
should find nothing after him, some understand,
 that *after*, or besides the Supreme God, man

should acknowledge no other being, on whom his lot or destiny absolutely depends. Solomon is supposed to explode here the absurd and pernicious doctrine of *two independent principles*, the one *good* and the other *evil*; a doctrine so prevalent in the east, and so adapted to divide the human heart in that religious regard, which is alone due to the one Great and Supreme Disposer of all events. In this view of the words the wise king calls men to acknowledge the goodness of God in the day of prosperity, and to have recourse to the same Being for protection and deliverance in the day of adversity, because he is the sole disposer of both, and they are both the measures of his undivided empire over the children of men in this their first and probationary state. Agreeable to this are the words of the Most High, by the mouth of his Prophet. *I am the LORD, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil. I the LORD do all these things* *.

The words before us are, no doubt, susceptible of this sense, if we consider them

* Isaiah, xlv. 7.

separately from the connexion in which they stand. But their connexion leads us palpably to consider them as expressive not only of God's undivided empire, but also of its unerring wisdom. *Consider*, says Solomon, *the work of God; who can make that straight, which he has made crooked?* A proverbial expression, which implies that the work of God and the plan of his government, are unalterable and perfect. Our duty, then, according to the injunctions of the wise king, is to make a proper use of the dispensations of Providence instead of contesting their wisdom. In the day of prosperity we are called to *be joyful*, in the day of adversity we are called to *consider*;—for God hath placed the one over against the other, to the end that *man should find nothing after him; i. e.* nothing to correct; nothing that is liable to any well-founded objection, in point of wisdom and goodness. And it is this that the son of Syrac has in view in that fine passage of his sublime book; *O how desirable are all his works! All things are double, one against another; and he hath made nothing imperfect: one thing establisheth the good of another; and who shall be filled*

with beholding his glory?—And, indeed, in whatever point of view we consider the mixture of external good and evil, that characterizes the present state of man; whether with respect to private persons or public communities, we shall find it both wise and salutary. In general, it has been acknowledged by the best observers of men and things, that religion, and the virtues it is adapted to form and nourish, are necessary to the true happiness, both of nations and individuals. Now, if religious virtue be necessary to the true happiness of mankind, it seems evident, that a mixture of suffering with enjoyment in their lot, is, in the present imperfect state of human nature, necessary to the subsistence of religious virtue. How often does it happen, that religious and virtuous principles lose their energy during a long course of uninterrupted prosperity,—that men forget the benefactor amidst the multitude of his gifts, and lose sight even of the duties, whose obligation the experience of his goodness renders peculiarly respectable? And this is not all; for irregular passions, nourished in the bosom of long peace and abundance,

counteract the true ends and purposes of life, pervert the taste for genuine felicity, render men proud, sensual, and selfish, from whence innumerable disorders arise, both on the private and public scene, which poison all the sweets of prosperity and turn them into bitterness. And in such cases, do not the corrections of adversity become seasonable? Is not the day of trial placed here with propriety and wisdom? Is it not a measure of good government, and (if properly improved) may it not turn out to be a measure of providential benignity, to shew men and nations the uncertainty of the blessings they have enjoyed unworthily, that they may perceive their errors, and open their eyes on the government of that Great Being whose laws they have insulted, and whose mercies they have abused? To connect, then, both private and public calamities, in many instances, with moral disorder and vicious passions; is such a necessary measure of ruling Wisdom, that if this connexion never took place, a foundation would be laid for a plausible objection against God's moral government.—If it does not always take place, the reason is, that the sea-

son of full retribution is reserved for a future scene.

But the mixture of good and evil in the life of man must be considered under other points of view, in order to the farther illustration of this important subject. For it is a general law of Providence, to which all are more or less subjected; and the righteous, as well as the wicked, has his evil days, and those often in great number.—It is this promiscuous distribution of external good and evil, that has frequently perplexed the impatient ignorance of short-sighted observers of the ways of Providence; nay, excited complaints and murmurs, equally detrimental to their inward peace and their religious improvement. The following considerations will lead us to a more rational and salutary judgment concerning the mixture of temporal good and evil in the life of man.

First, This constitution of things is in no wise inconsistent with the justice of God. In a state of existence, which we derive from the Deity, we can never complain of injustice, if there be a compensation of good attainable by us, which indemnifies for the evils

evils of life, and above all, if there be such high rewards, both here and hereafter, annexed to the practice of religion and virtue, as render, upon the whole, the state of the righteous most desirable and happy. The children of affliction may feel deeply their sorrows; but who are they that will presume to say, that they are unjustly dealt with, and deserve nothing but good at the hand of God? It is not surely the wicked, who brave his empire and transgress his laws; nor the sensual, indolent, and barren professor of religion, who receives the bounty of Heaven with an ungrateful insensibility, that will pretend to deem it unjust in the Supreme Being to mix evil with the good, which they have so unworthily enjoyed. As to the good man, the righteous friend of God, he will neither murmur nor complain, for reasons which shall be particularly considered in their place. He knows, that the Lord is not only just, but gracious to him, even when the day of adversity seems to frown upon him. Conscious of his defects. *Lord, be merciful to me a sinner,* will be the language of his pious humility; but, at the same time, conscious of his sincerity,

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city, and stedfast in hope, this truth, that *all things shall work together for good to those that love God*, will be the rich and permanent source of his consolation. Besides, amidst all the evils which are mingled with our lot in human life, how manifold are our blessings, unworthy as we are? How many years of health are enjoyed for one season of infirmity and sickness? If we take a recollected and impartial view of what we have experienced and observed in human life, shall we not acknowledge, that the *evil days* of pain and suffering have been very considerably surpassed in number, by days of well-being and comfort; and that the latter would have been still more numerous, if we had not embittered them by the neglect or misimprovement of the means of true enjoyment, with which we were favoured, and an abuse of the gifts and blessings of Providence. Dark, indeed, and gloomy is the day of adversity with which we are at present visited *, but it comes after long periods of peace and abundance, (very little and rarely interrupted,) which we have

* This Discourse was delivered at the Hague in the year 1795.

unworthily enjoyed, and by the abuse of which we have fatally contributed to our actual degradation and the evils which oppress us. Do not then complain of severity, and still less of injustice, in the Supreme Hand, which associates the good and the evil day in the lot of humanity. It is not God, that is unjust or severe; it is man, who is perverse and ungrateful.

Secondly. The mixture of good and evil in the lot of man is not only consistent with justice, but is, moreover, both in its design and in its tendency, if properly improved, a dispensation of paternal goodness. Pain and suffering are not ultimate *ends*, but salutary *means*, in the government of that holy and benevolent Being, whose essence is love, and *who dwelleth in love*; and it was only when man, created upright, fell from his rectitude, that natural evil was appointed to chastise and correct moral disorder. *Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die, saith the Lord God, and not rather that he should turn from his ways and live* *? and with respect to the

* Ezekiel, xviii. 23.

righteous,

righteous, who, even in the midst of a virtuous course, have nevertheless their errors and transgressions to acknowledge and lament, the Apostle observes, *that whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth* *. In effect, the mixture of external good and evil in the present probationary state of man is a palpable proof of the goodness and wisdom of a ruling Providence. For, from what we observed at our entrance on this head, it will appear evident, that nothing is more dangerous to the moral state of the mind than an uninterrupted course of prosperity, which to passions and fancy is the dream of false felicity, and by furnishing them with perpetual means of indulgence, cools our zeal, and relaxes our activity in a virtuous practice. Now if this be true, and if it is the natural tendency of elevation and opulence to engender vanity and self-importance, to create and multiply imaginary wants, and expose to numberless temptations, the Christian, notwithstanding the goodness of his principles, may sometimes stand in need of trials and suffering, to main-

* Heb. xii. 6.

tain his integrity and preserve his virtuous principles from corruption. And it is here that adversity may come forward with success to abate the ardour of the passions, dispel the illusions of fancy, and, bringing along with it the hour of reflexion, obtain for reason and religion a fair hearing with respect to true happiness. Thus the attentive mind learns, by a salutary experience, that prosperity has its dangers, and adversity its advantages; and perceives equally in both the wisdom and goodness of the great Disposer of all events. In this view of God's providential dispensations, we see all the Christian virtues improved, and we see how they strengthen and improve each other. In the changing scenes of good and evil, submission is supported and nourished by gratitude, and the love of God, which is never extinguished in the virtuous heart, even in the darkest moments, is however exercised with redoubled feelings of piety and pleasure, when, after sorrow endured in the night, joy returns in the morning.

We may add, *thirdly*, that the mixture of evil with good in the lot of man is a *gracious*,

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as well as a wise dispensation of Providence, to modify our attachment to a present world. Excessive would that attachment be, if the days of this life were always unclouded and serene. Even as the case stands, and with all the disappointments, vexations, and sorrows, which mingle with bitterness our present enjoyments, we are still, God knows, too much disposed to seek our chief portion, our sovereign good here below, instead of *laying up treasures in Heaven*, which is our true country. We are too apt to forget that we are only travellers, and too much inclined to think that we are at home. How much then would this dangerous illusion, this oblivion of our immortality, grow upon us, if a portion of bitterness were not frequently mingled with the cup of pleasure, to admonish us that pure enjoyment and true felicity are not to be found here below? You see, then, that the day of adversity is adapted to correct our illusions, and thus, though its aspect may seem severe, its design and tendency bear evident marks of divine wisdom and goodness. The bed of sickness, the loss of our dear relations and friends, the frowns of fortune, the injustice of our enemies,
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public calamities, and domestic sorrows are all designed, in the plan of Providence, to make us *use* a present *world without abusing it*, and *set* our principle *affections* and desires *on things above*. In all these clouds that cover his prosperous day, the faith of the Christian will see the hand of his God pointing to immortality, and shewing him his true, his glorious destination, to revive the ardour of his pious desires for the *things that are invisible and eternal*. And not only supportable, but happy and salutary are those dark moments, which lead the soul, sinking under the burden of its pains and sorrows, to seek for pure happiness at the fountain-head, and to draw from the promises of God and the light of his countenance the assurance and fore-taste of eternal felicity! Such is the design, and such may be the fruits of the mixture of evil with good in the state of man, if man be not wanting to himself. For these reasons has God placed the day of adversity *over against* the day of prosperity, and who *shall find any thing after him*? Who shall contest his benignity and wisdom in this arrangement? We shall see its wisdom and benignity still farther displayed,

displayed, when we come to shew, in the two following Discourses, the respective duties which the day of prosperity and the day of adversity require from man.

In the mean time, let what has been now observed concerning the dispensations of the great and good Being, who *creates the light, forms the darkness*, and associates temporal good and evil in the lot of humanity, confirm us in the pious habit of arising to him, in every event which concerns us, with those sentiments of confidence or humility, gratitude or resignation, which these events are respectively adapted to excite, and always with a pious and obedient regard to his laws in every circumstance and condition of life. This will tend to realize and accomplish, with respect to us, that positive and important promise, that *all things shall work together for good to those that love God.*

DISCOURSE X.

On the DUTIES and true ENJOYMENT of
PROSPERITY.

ECCLESIASTES, vii. 14.

IN THE DAY OF PROSPERITY BE JOYFUL.

THAT the day of prosperity is placed by God *over against the day of adversity*, and that this mixture of good and evil in the life of man, bears conspicuous lines of Divine wisdom and goodness, we have already shewn in a preceding Discourse. These truths are not merely objects of speculation; they have the most solemn and important demands upon practice, as they are adapted to lead us to the proper improvement and the true enjoyment of human life. Accordingly, we now propose
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to illustrate and enforce the double precept, which Solomon founds on these interesting truths. In the day of prosperity be *joyful*—In the day of adversity *consider*.

In the sequel of this Discourse we shall confine our meditations to the first of these precepts, and consider the duties and the line of conduct prescribed in these words, *In the day of prosperity be joyful*.

I. By the *day of prosperity*, we are to understand, the pleasing scenes of human life, the external blessings of health, abundance, reputation, social enjoyment, which Providence has mixed with the sufferings and trials of our present transitory state. The condition of life in which these abound, is, no doubt, highly desirable; but it is not without its difficulties and dangers, because proportionable to the number and extent of our temporal advantages and enjoyments, are the duties we must perform, the temptations we have to encounter, and the delusions we are to avoid.

It is true, that what Solomon enjoins here, with respect to the day of prosperity, is expressed in a single word, which, as our
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version has rendered the original, does not seem, at first sight, to have an extensive signification, or to contain a precept of any difficulty or much importance. *To be joyful*, is a command easily obeyed ; for nothing is more natural and less meritorious than to feel pleasure and joy in a state of prosperity. There are, however, on the one hand, persons of a fullen and splenetic cast of mind, whose hearts are never dilated with contentment and satisfaction, even under the richest displays of the bounty of Providence ; while, on the other, the day of prosperity, abused to the purposes of luxurious riot, excites in others the intoxicating joys of intemperance and folly, which are followed by disgust, and engender sorrow. Such joys, of which Solomon himself had experienced the vanity and the bitter fruits, could not be made the matter of a precept in the words before us.

The words of our text, as they stand in the original, may, with great propriety, be translated thus ; “ In the day of prosperity *enjoy* “ *it* ;” and this has a more extensive signification than the term *joyful*. It implies essentially such a use and improvement
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of prosperity, as is necessary to render it a source of real satisfaction and true enjoyment. The lessons, even of Pagan wisdom, as well as the admonitions of the wisdom *that is from above*, call us to be upon our guard against the allurements of a prosperous state. And from the general tenour, and the solemn conclusion of the book from which our text is taken, it is evident that, when Solomon exhorts us to *enjoy* the day of prosperity, he means by this precept, that we should enjoy it as becomes reasonable and immortal beings, whom God has placed for a short time in a state of trial, amidst a perpetual mixture of good and evil; and whose future condition, with respect to happiness or misery, will depend upon our virtuous use or vicious abuse of the gifts of Heaven here below. Agreeable to this, is the manner in which he terminates his estimate of human life, in the last chapter of this book. *Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter : fear God and keep his commandments : for God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.*—To enjoy then truly the day of prosperity,

rity, we must enjoy it, 1st, as the gift of God; 2dly, as a gift conferred for a certain end; and, 3dly, as a gift which may be recalled.

I. To enjoy prosperity in a manner suitable to our nature and relations, we must enjoy it as the gift of God; which we hold in a perpetual dependence on his providential wisdom and goodness, and carry about with us an habitual persuasion, that all its blessings do really proceed directly or indirectly from God. This persuasion, which is so essential to the existence of piety and virtue, is less general than you may imagine, or than any rational mind can conceive. It is combated by the wretched sophistry of the sceptic, which sheds uncertainty over the origin of things, and terminates in vague and frigid ideas of *Nature*, as the blind, mechanical, or casual source of all his enjoyments. In others, this persuasion has no root or consistence, for want of attention and reflexion:—grovelling in stupidity and ignorance, from the influence of a sensual and frivolous life, they have no taste for the pleasures of reason and truth; and rarely think of raising their

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views from the effect to the cause, from the gift to the giver. Many acknowledge a Supreme hand as concerned in their prosperity, but have an undue confidence in second causes, and attribute much to themselves. The Christian philosopher will attribute, on the contrary, all the branches of his well-being to God. He will see the Divine hand operating in his favour, in circumstances to which he has not, himself, in anywise concurred; such as those of advantageous birth, a well-directed education, a robust constitution, acute and vigorous intellectual powers, and a variety of unforeseen events of a pleasing kind. He will perceive the same hand promoting his prosperity, even in cases where his own active exertions have concurred. He will acknowledge the Supreme cause, which has furnished the means that he has employed, bestowed and preserved the faculties he has exerted, and blessed the labour and industry he has used in promoting his prosperity. Thus, while a great part of mankind see their Celestial Benefactor in nothing: the good man will see him in *all* things, and acknowledge his hand in all the circumstances
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and events of his prosperous day. It will be his earnest desire not to forget one of the benefits of his God ; or if they are too numerous to come all under his recollection, he will say with the Psalmist, *How precious are thy thoughts to me, O God, how great is the sum of them ! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand.* His existence and preservation, his health, strength, talents, and genius ; his opulence, reputation, protectors, and friends, will all be so many steps to carry him up to his Creator, the *Author of every good and perfect gift.* And here a peculiar and additional pleasure attends prosperity, which the richest abundance of its blessings cannot, alone, administer ; and which none but the good man can feel. This pleasure arises from the consideration, that the day of prosperity comes from the greatest and best of Beings. The idea of Him, who is the giver, will embellish the gift, and render it peculiarly pleasing and precious. Even among men, the beneficence and gifts of a respectable friend, have a singular merit in our estimation, on account of the donor : With what a gracious and pleasing aspect

then must the day of prosperity arise, to those who consider it as proceeding from the *Father of lights*? This pure delight, which tempers the fervour of the passions, and thus renders them subservient to our well-being, is unknown to those sensual worldlings, who confine their views to the objects of desire and enjoyment, and seldom, or never, raise their thoughts to him from whom they proceed. And how rarely does it happen that external prosperity is to them a state of true satisfaction? Like the Israelites in the desert, they receive the food of heaven; and like them also, they eat and are *filled*, but are not *satisfied*. It is more especially painful to think, that the marks of a pious sensibility to the gifts of the Almighty are not the most observable, where the displays of his goodness have been the most ample and abundant; and this is a proof of the dangerous tendency of a brilliant prosperity, to engender a spirit of levity and inattention, and corrupt the purest and noblest feelings of the human mind. In the less exalted stations of life, which are equally removed from superfluity and want, (and whose decent competence we may fairly
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comprehend under what Solomon calls the day of prosperity,) the hand of the Supreme Benefactor is, generally speaking, less forgotten. But, under all the dispensations of a beneficent Providence, it is the duty of the Christian to nourish, habitually, the joyful sense of his dependence on the best of Beings. This will be the subject of his frequent and pleasing meditations. He *will* remember the Lord upon *his bed, and meditate upon him in the night-watches ; and because the Most High has been his help, therefore will he rejoice in the shadow of his wings.*—And these meditations on the author and source of his prosperity, will go up to heaven and be rendered acceptable by the sacred incense of *gratitude*, that delightful affection, which unites saints on earth and angels in heaven in one eternal bond of attachment to him, who is *good unto all*. He will even feel a pious anxiety to perform this sacred duty with the greatest possible sincerity and ardour of affection. The language of his heart and life will be, *What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits ?*

II. But in order to the true enjoyment of prosperity, it is not enough to regard it as the gift of God: we must also receive it as a gift bestowed *for certain ends and purposes*. In a general view of the Divine goodness, we may conclude that one of the purposes for which it dispenses prosperity, is the personal comfort and well-being of those to whom it is sent. This gracious design of Providence renders it properly an object of gratitude; and, accordingly, when the opulent are exhorted by the Apostle, *not to trust in uncertain riches, but in the Living God*, he observes, at the same time, that *God has given them all things richly to enjoy**. They, consequently, do not act conformably to the intentions of Providence, who, from the scrupulous suggestions of a superstitious austerity, look upon it, almost, as criminal to enjoy the bounty of Heaven, or to taste the sweets of their prosperity with satisfaction and sensibility. But on the other hand, it is certain, that both reason and revelation announce it as the will and intention of our Supreme Be-

* 1 Tim. vi. 17.

nefactor, *first*, that prosperity be enjoyed with that moderation and humility which are necessary to render it a real blessing; and, *secondly*, that it be employed as an instrument of beneficence to our fellow-creatures, from whence it becomes a new and a noble source of enjoyment to ourselves. These are, no doubt, the great ends and purposes for which the wise beneficence of Providence sends prosperity.

1. In the day of prosperity, moderation is absolutely necessary to its true enjoyment. This is the virtue, or rather the habitual frame and tenour of mind, which, formed by reason and religious principle, gives the Christian a happy controul over his inferior passions and appetites. It is sometimes termed, by the Sacred Writers, *soberness*, or soundness, *of mind*, as it is a preservative and safeguard against moral disorder, against the blind impulse of passion and the illusions of irregular fancy, which lead to intemperance and excess, and often convert pleasure and enjoyment into dejection and disgust. Without this happy frame of mind, you may obtain tumultuous and temporary flashes of pleasure, but can derive no
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pure and permanent enjoyment from the day of prosperity. Vice, in all its forms, and more especially that vicious excess and intemperance which are nourished by ease and abundance, corrupt and degrade the mind: they let loose the reins to the passions, whose nature it is to run into extremes, and even to grasp at contradictions, which spread disorder and tumult in the soul, and render it *like the troubled sea when it cannot rest*. When moderation loses thus its balance and its empire, a door is opened to degrading sensuality, luxurious avarice, or insatiable ambition, followed by discontent, envy, and remorse. All these inflame, disturb, intoxicate, and deject, in their turns. They blast the fairest gifts of God's bounty, and destroy that internal tranquillity which is essential to all true enjoyment of the external blessings of life.

But mild is the lustre, and pure is the satisfaction, which crown the day of prosperity to the good man, who has learned to abstain as well as to enjoy. Moderation, which maintains the ascendant of religion and virtue over his appetites and passions, is his guide and his guardian against the *lusts of the*

eye and the *'pride of life*, which the splendour of power or high station are so adapted to excite and inflame. No true enjoyment of prosperity without this virtue, or rather this spirit of power, formed by religious and virtuous principle, which holds, as it were, a supremacy in the mind over the inferior appetites. This ruling spirit prevents that excess which makes the pleasures of sense terminate in satiety, dejection, and remorse; it is the source of that internal liberty which dignifies man, and which the Sacred Writers mention as the sublime characteristic of the *children of God*: it renders the Christian capable of deriving pleasure from whatever he possesses; it contributes to preserve the health of his body and the serenity of his mind, and from hence all the external blessings and advantages, which constitute the day of prosperity, derive their sweetest relish. To all this we may add, that a prosperous state, enjoyed with moderation and religious principle, will furnish various means of perfecting our faculties, improving our talents, increasing our knowledge, and thus, of consequence, will greatly enlarge the sphere of our enjoyments.

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2. But the noblest enjoyment of prosperity, and that which crowns all the rest, is the generous and elevated pleasure it yields when it is made the instrument of beneficence and usefulness to our fellow-creatures. It is this that gives the most exquisite gratification to those whom Providence has enriched with worldly abundance, and religion has taught and inclined to adorn it with the amiable displays of beneficence and charity. And, indeed, without these, the splendour of prosperity is tarnished, its luxuries grow insipid through habitual indulgence, the senses are *sated*, while the mind, formed for nobler enjoyments, is not *satisfied*; and the simple fare of the peasant, seasoned by sobriety and honest labour, and competent to answer the real wants of nature, is productive of more lasting pleasure and contentment than the refined inventions of the opulent. Besides, prosperity was not sent to you, O man! only for your own personal comfort, and still less to satiate your selfish and sensual passions; but principally for the higher purpose of rendering you a fellow-worker with the Giver of all good, in promoting the happiness of those who are within
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the reach of your beneficence. And to what a noble enjoyment does the day of prosperity here call the good man? By imparting a generous portion of his substance in beneficence, he sheds enjoyment upon others, which is reflected back into his own heart with the purest and most delicate sensations of delight. By such acts, friendship is vivified; charity, though it seeks no reward, is sublimely recompensed by the fruits it produces; and a godlike temper is formed, which bears some lines of the happiness of angelic minds, who live in the presence and fulfil the orders of Him, *who is love, and dwelleth in love. It is more blessed to give than to receive*: this is the declaration of the Divine Saviour, who best knew how to appreciate all the sentiments and feelings of the human heart. It was this truth that solaced Job in the extremity of his distress, when he reflected that, in his prosperity, *he had not withheld from the poor his desire, nor eaten his morsel alone in presence of the fatherless, nor left the needy to perish for want of cloathing**.—

* Job, xxxi. 17.

In effect, if you separate, in thought, from the possession of prosperity the grateful love of the Being from whom it comes, the method of enjoying it truly which piety and wisdom prescribe, the noble virtues for whose exercise it furnishes the means, the applause of conscience which accompanies the performance of its beneficent duties, and the pure honour and reputation with which they cloath the good man, whose eye is raised to a more sublime reward;—if you separate, I say, all this from the possession of prosperity, what remains? The account is short; there remain animal gratifications; but these, however necessary, do not answer the demands of that kind of happiness for which man was formed; they cloy by frequent repetition, and often become productive of perturbation, disgust, and remorse. There may indeed remain enjoyments of a less grovelling nature, in which virtue has no exercise; such are the pleasures of ingenious luxury, which occupy the imagination, and the round of diversions, in which a great part of the fashionable world run from one object to another in restless expectation of what they seldom find; but all these leave no
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after-taste that satisfies the heart, no solid provision for permanent self-enjoyment, nothing that rises in pleasing remembrance in the hour of solitude and reflexion, nothing that resembles the *soul's calm sunshine*, and the *heartfelt joy* which are the prize of virtue.—*Be joyful* then, O man! in *the day of prosperity*; but that this joy may be pure and solid, enjoy it as the servant of God, and as, by your gospel vocation, the heir of immortality. This character and title give the Christian a stable tenor of tranquillity and self-enjoyment amidst all the vicissitudes of earthly things. More especially, they prevent dejection and dismay, when he is told that prosperity must be enjoyed not only as the gift of God, and a gift bestowed in order to be wisely improved; but also, *thirdly*, as a gift that may be recalled and withdrawn at a short warning. It is with the consideration of this plain but important truth that we shall conclude this Discourse.

III. Great, indeed, is the delusion of those who enjoy prosperity as if it was a fixed and sure, instead of being a very precarious and uncertain, possession. The providential appointment of God mentioned in our text, and the

the changes and vicissitudes which so often remove our fairest temporal blessings, and mix sorrow and bitterness with those that remain, ought to prevent this delusion. There is something delirious in the case of the avaricious, *who says to gold, thou art my hope, and to fine gold, thou art my confidence* ; and in that of the votaries of luxury and sensual pleasure, who are perpetually calling out, *it is good to be here*, and say in their prosperity, that *they shall never be moved*. Belfhazzar was speaking in this strain when he perceived an ominous writing on the wall, which announced his blasted prosperity, and immediately *his thoughts trouble him ; the joints of his knees are loosed, and his knees smite one against the other*. Similar examples of delusion and disappointment are renewed and repeated to our observation every day, and shall they not administer instruction ? Surely, my brethren, to true Christians their instruction will be both affecting and salutary. Such will learn from these examples to enjoy the *day of prosperity* as a day that may be suddenly overcast with clouds, and that shall certainly pass, sooner or later, like a transitory vision, and end in darkness.

ness. They will, more especially, learn to enjoy it truly by improving it wisely, and adorning it with the duties of piety and beneficence, which will survive its ruins, and render its temporary advantages productive of everlasting fruit. They will learn to taste its comforts with grateful love, as marks of God's paternal goodness; but they will look higher for their true and permanent felicity. They will consider themselves, even in their happiest days, as only *strangers* and *travellers upon earth*, whose chief treasure is in Heaven, to which, as to their true country, their affections and desires will tend. When they see here below external good perpetually mixed with evil, when they find themselves every moment exposed to see their fairest comforts vanish, and their most precious connexions dissolved, they will esteem it the most fatal imprudence and folly to attach their hearts immoderately to such transitory objects, and lay the foundations of their happiness in a world, all whose enjoyments are precarious, and whose *fashion passeth away*. But, above all, the hopes, the sublime hopes, which arise from his high and immortal destination,

will engage the Christian, even in the most smiting scenes of human life, to raise his principal views and desires above the world. Considering this world as only the first state of his existence, he will deem it unwise to center his views and desires in it alone; he will, by faith and hope, take frequent prospects of his celestial country, and will thus be enabled to alleviate the pains and enjoy truly the advantages of his present condition.

Such is the secret, the true method, of rendering prosperity a source of satisfaction and comfort; but you see that it is only in the sanctuary of religion that this secret is to be learned. It is only when prosperity is enjoyed as the *gift of God*, as a gift conferred to be *piously improved*, as a gift which may be *recalled*, and must always be considered as precarious and unstable; it is, I say, in these cases alone that prosperity can be regarded as a real blessing. Certainly it is not such to the vicious and irreligious man, whose deluded eyes prosperity has closed on *righteousness, temperance, and a judgment to come*. Though the hour of reflexion and awakening may not yet have alarmed him, and made him tremble
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like Felix in the midst of his voluptuous career, it would betray a strange ignorance of human nature to pronounce such a man contented and happy. He may riot in abundance, and drink deep of the intoxicating cup of pleasure; but he is a prey to insatiable desires, which are accompanied with tumult, disquietude, and disgust; and the calm dignity of a peaceful mind, which is the essence of happiness, is unknown to him.

But there is peace to the virtuous servant of God, even in the day of adversity; how pleasing then must his state be, when the Lord, his guardian and his shepherd, makes him *lie down in the green pastures*, and leads him *beside the still waters* of temporal felicity. His pious intercourse with the bountiful Author of his prosperity prevents those abuses that poison its comforts, calms those passions which would trouble its current, hinders guilty fears from damping its pleasures, and heightens these pleasures by ennobling them with spiritual joys and celestial prospects.—*Go on then in thy way rejoicing. Eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart, for God accepteth thy work.*

DISCOURSE XI.

On the proper IMPROVEMENT of ADVERSITY.

ECCLESIASTES, vii. 14.

IN THE DAY OF ADVERSITY CONSIDER.

AFTER having considered the sentiments and the line of conduct which are necessary to the improvement and true enjoyment of prosperity, we now propose to follow the Christian in the painful circumstances of human life, and to point out the duties implied in these emphatical words; *In the day of adversity, CONSIDER.*

We need not tell you, what is to be understood by the *day of adversity*. Observation and experience teach this sufficiently to the children of men. Our complaints shew,
abundantly,

abundantly, that we feel it; but our conduct shews too rarely that we know how to improve it and allay its bitterness. *Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward*; it is the condition of his transitory existence on this scene of trial and mortality. This proceeds partly from the wise appointment of God, and partly from the perverse and irregular passions of man; for *affliction cometh not forth from the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground*; that is, they are not the productions of chance, nor the unmeaning effects of a blind fatality, but proper arrangements in the empire of a wise and righteous Providence. As to the fact, it is evident. In all his relations, man is exposed to the shafts of adversity, to deep suffering from public calamities, domestic sorrows, and personal pains; and these, experienced in a great variety of kinds and degrees, for either a longer or shorter duration, constitute the *day of adversity*.

We pointed out, in a preceding Discourse, the dangers of a prosperous state, from its tendency to inflame the passions, and to form a vicious taste for happiness, for which ad-

versity has been always esteemed a useful and salutary corrective. So, no doubt, it is, when properly improved. But adversity has its dangers as well as prosperity; and Agur knew, what the infirmity and corruption of human nature had to apprehend from both the one and the other, when he said, *Give me neither poverty nor riches*. If, in the one, men are prone, through the intoxication of pleasure, to forget their Supreme Benefactor; in the other, they frequently lose sight of the correcting hand of their Father and their Judge; for suffering excites, in many, indolence and impatience, and these increase the gloom of adversity, and produce additional perplexity and dejection. However, my brethren, in the sanctuary of religion, there is always a refuge and resource for the suffering Christian. In the counsels and promises of that Divine Word which God has given us, as a *lamp to our path*, the believing mind will find both instruction and power. From thence the good man may derive a rule of conduct, which will give him sure direction, and verify, to his experience, that saying of the Psalmist; *Unto the upright light shall arise*
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in the darknefs; ſurely he ſhall not be moved.

Let his calamities be heavy or light; let them affect his perſon or his external enjoyments and connexions, his rule of conduct is ſtill the ſame. In all the forms and inſtances of adverſity, his duties are comprehended by Solomon, in our text, in one word. In the day of adverſity *conſider*. But what are we to underſtand by this precept? It implies, in general, a proper attention to whatever may diminifh the evils we ſuffer, or make them contribute, in the iſſue, to our well-being and happineſs. More particularly, to *conſider*, in the day of adverſity, ſuppoſes a ſerious attention to the four following things;—to the *nature* of the evils we ſuffer, that we may eſtimate them properly:—to the *authority*, founded in juſtice and wiſdom, of him who ſends them, that we may learn ſubmiſſion:—to the *ends* and purpoſes for which they are ſent, or permitted, by the providence of God, that we may enter into his views by a right improvement of his diſpenſations:—and laſtly, to the lawful *means*, which wiſdom and prudence may ſuggeſt to ſoften our pains, or to obtain their removal.

I. Our first care, then, in the day of adversity, should be to *consider* the *nature* of the evils we suffer, in order to estimate them with equity. How defective is the manner of judging on this head, that too generally prevails? The prejudices of education, the influence of example, our natural temper, and selfish passions, darken or pervert our reason, and prevent our seeing things in their true point of view. Many, from an excessive sensibility and selfishness, magnify, beyond measure, the sum of their sufferings; tire every one they meet, with an exaggerated recital of their disasters, and are perpetually calling out, like Cain, *My chastisement is greater than I am able to bear*. Others appear insensible, or less affected, in the day of adversity; their hearts, hardened by levity, corruption, or a certain pride and ferocity of character, scarcely feel at all, or if they feel painfully, they are soon comforted. But the conduct, both of those who feel with an excessive sensibility, and of those who scarcely feel at all, is equally erroneous and unhappy. It betrays, on both sides, a wrong frame of mind, which renders men unfit for discharging

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ing the most important duties of human life. The former shew, in their extreme dejection, a pusillanimity which, when their sufferings are personal, prevents those active and vigorous exertions which often bring relief; and when their calamities are derived from national adversity, and they suffer with the public, what happens? In this case, their excessive sensibility is contagious and becomes pernicious to the interests of the public, by communicating discouragement, terror, and weakness to those, who are within the reach and influence of their examples. With respect to the latter class of persons, their indifference and apathy are vicious in a high degree. It is unnatural to be insensible to our own afflictions: it is inhuman to be indifferent about the sufferings of others; it is ungenerous and base to be little affected by public and national calamities.—The first thing, then, incumbent upon those who are visited with the day of adversity, is to *consider* the nature and degree of the evils they suffer, and without either exaggerating or disguising their weight, to feel them, as, in reality, they ought to be felt.

II. But,

II. But, in the second place, while we consider the nature of our afflictions and sufferings, we are called, by the day of adversity, to consider the *authority* by which they are appointed, that we may humble ourselves under the hand of the Disposer of all events with profound and patient submission. It is the precious privilege of the Christian to know from whence his sufferings and trials proceed. It is his happy privilege to know, that the day of adversity comes from the same *Father* of lights, who is the *Author of every good and perfect gift*; and that all the events of time and of eternity are under his direction. It is not to capricious chance, to blind fate, or to evil, unsubjected to the empire of Providence, that he is called to submit, but to supreme and paternal wisdom; to benignity clothed with righteousness and truth. This persuasion can, alone, produce meek submission and peace in the feeling mind, under the sharp trials of adversity. Accordingly, we see, how, in the dark seasons of human life, the selfish passions work in those who are destitute of religious principles, or have only the *form of godliness* without its spirit and power.

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Such turn their whole attention to the calamities they suffer, and to their second causes. Instead of checking their extreme sensibility, they nourish and indulge it, and impatience and murmuring appear to them, even innocent and lawful in the period of distress. They forget that Providence has called them to drink their portion of the mixed cup which is held forth to man in his present state, and thus they increase its bitterness. They want that strength of mind which, formed by religious sentiments and prospects, softens the sharpness of pain and sorrow, and renders the heart accessible to consolation and relief.— But different are the effects of the day of adversity on the good man, who considers it as the wise dispensation of Heaven; a transitory day in the sublime plan of God's righteous, eternal, and benevolent empire; *out of the depths* he raises his eye to that empire, and *his heart is fixed* by submission and hope. He will not contest with that Sovereign, whose authority, whether he *forms the light*, or *creates darkness*, is always exercised with wisdom and goodness. Through the dark cloud of affliction, as well as in the sun-shine of

of prosperity, he will perceive Him, whose government is wisdom, and whose essence is love; and this view of the God that reigns, will soften his pains and turn his submission into pleasing confidence.

It is true, indeed, that though we know in general, the salutary fruits of adversity in mortifying those irregular passions, whose intemperance and excess are the true sources of human misery; yet we cannot see, in every instance, the particular reasons why some prosper and others are afflicted; nor of the time, the kind, and degree of suffering, with which the latter are visited. We know but imperfectly the real characters of men; we are still less able to perceive the remote tendencies of things, and their relations and connexions in the vast plan of Providence, in which the past, the present, and the future are comprehended.—Hence it must be impossible for us to see clearly, in every particular case, the reasons of God's ways to the children of men. But in the midst of this ignorance of particular reasons and particular cases, there is one evident and general cause of the external evils and sufferings of a present
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sent life, which we may know with certainty ; and this cause is sin, or a deviation from the laws of righteousness and order. Moral evil, and natural evil, that is, sin and suffering, were originally connected, and are still so in the Divine government ; and, for one seeming exception to this general rule, how many are the examples which daily illustrate and confirm it ? We know, from the history of our first parents, that *sin* introduced *sorrow*, into a state where every thing seemed adapted to produce satisfaction and enjoyment. The one was in the justice and wisdom of God, designed to be the corrective and chastisement of the other. Had man continued in the full enjoyment of external happiness, after he became a transgressor, there would have been an end of all virtue and order upon earth. This great law of wisdom and justice, which connects natural with moral evil, still remains in force. Nor does it only take place, with respect to the more corrupt part of mankind ; it extends its influence even to the righteous. For the best of men are not exempt from all remains of sin and corruption : they have their failings and their follies, their irregular passions,

passions, their favourite sins, *which more easily beset them*, and therefore they are liable to the pains and sufferings to which sin has subjected human nature. If these sufferings are not always *punishments*, in the strict sense of the word, they are, at least, corrective chastisements, appointed by their Heavenly Father to reclaim them from their deviations, or salutary trials to exercise and purify their imperfect virtues. Thus all, though in different ways, suited to their different and respective characters, are called to acknowledge, in the day of adversity, the wisdom and justice of God in their respective trials and sufferings, and to humble themselves under his hand with the most profound submission. —Nor is it only to individuals that the dispensations of Providence address this solemn and instructive lesson, but also to nations, which have a moral personality under God's awful empire. They have their periods of prosperity and adversity, and how remarkably is their decline connected with the depravation of their principles and manners? Open the annals of history, and see what an awful spectacle they exhibit, of grandeur and decline,

cline, elevation and ruin, in consequence of that law of the Divine government, *that righteousness exalteth a nation*, while sin is the reproach of a people. We have no example of a nation, whose prosperity has been blasted, without recovery, in the period of its virtue; but we live in a time, when the language of Providence speaks with singular perspicuity, nay, with a tremendous majesty, in the fate of nations; and calls mankind to see, in glaring examples, the deplorable effects of daring impiety and overgrown corruption.

III. Instead, therefore, of contesting with God, by murmuring and impatience, it is our business to revere *his* dispensations, to consider *our* ways, and to attend to the important and salutary *purposes* which are intended by Providence, and may be improved by us, when calamities fall to our lot. This is the third point we proposed to illustrate; and it has a peculiar claim to our serious attention. This branch of religious consideration is too rarely employed in the day of adversity. In that dark period, an anxious self-love too generally confines the thoughts of men to the evils they suffer, and
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the means of removing them. The last thing they think of, (and how many are there who never think of it at all?) is to ask themselves why they have been afflicted? For what purpose the day of adversity has visited them, and what it requires of them?

The answers to these questions are not the same, with respect to all those who are assaulted by the shocks of adversity. With respect to the profligate, who are hardened in transgression, these answers are awful; but they may prove salutary: with respect to true Christians, who have learned to read the language of Providence, they will answer these questions to themselves in a manner that will make cheering rays of *light* arise to them, even in the deepest darkness, and turn, in the issue, their submission and resignation into thanksgiving and praise.

To you, obstinate transgressor, whom the truths and promises of religion neither direct nor animate in the paths of obedience, nor elevate and delight with the hopes of immortality; to you, whose passions are your idols and your guides, the *day of adversity* is a *day of punishment*, in the strict sense of the word.

Yet even to you, punishment carries a voice of warning and admonition, as long as your state of trial continues. The best of Beings afflicts none from arbitrary will; he punishes the past with a view to the future, and sends to man temporal sorrows, that he may be led, by salutary chastisement, to avoid eternal evils. *Be instructed, lest my soul depart from thee!*—*Mind, in this your day, the things that belong to your eternal peace.* Such is the language of adversity to obstinate sinners; they may neglect it, but they will neglect it at their peril; for the time must come, when they will learn what a dreadful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God, when his admonitions have been rejected, and his mercies have been despised.

And what are the ends and purposes for which adversity is permitted to visit the righteous? We answer, for *correction* and *trial*. Whether their adversity proceeds from the part, they must, in the general laws of Providence, inevitably bear in all public and national calamities, (for which participation they shall be amply indemnified in due time,) or whether it consists in the more private and

personal evils to which humanity is exposed, its ends are always, in the intentions of Providence, salutary *correction* and improving *trial*; and happy those who know and feel this precious truth!

As to *correction*, the language of Providence is clear and obvious. In a long course of uninterrupted prosperity, a secret pride insinuates itself imperceptibly, even into good minds; and who is sure of preserving, in a state of elevation and abundance, that meekness and humility, which days of pain and sorrow inspire, by shewing us experimentally our infirmities and our dependence?—Again, the sins and errors which beset, with more or less facility, even good Christians, are not felt with such sensibility in a prosperous state, which engenders a spirit of lethargy and ease, as in the day of disappointment and affliction, which dispels illusion and awakens reflexion. The sons of Jacob sold their brother without compunction or remorse, and only felt the atrocity of their crime, when they found themselves distressed and afflicted in Egypt.

But if the day of adversity is designed, by a paternal Providence, to *correct* the errors
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and illusions of the righteous, it is moreover intended to *try*, that is, to exercise and improve their virtues. It renders their patience and fortitude more vigorous, by conflict and opposition. It calls up faith and hope to enlighten their darkness, and raise them from dejection, by lively views of the promises of their Redeemer, and of the crown he holds forth to animate their perseverance; and thus purifies all their virtues from the dross of sensuality and selfishness, as fire makes gold come purer and brighter from the furnace.

When the day of adversity is considered in this point of view, how does its forbidding aspect change, and remove all objections against the goodness and mercy of the Supreme Being! How beautifully does it illustrate those remarkable passages of Scripture, where the afflictions with which God visits his people are declared to be evidences of his paternal benignity and care, and that in which our Blessed Saviour himself expressly says, *As many as I love I rebuke and chasten* *!

* Rev. iii. 19.

If, in the day of adversity, we had the wisdom to consider these things, and to anticipate, by faith and pious reflexion, that happy day, when to those, who have suffered *with a patient continuance in well-doing*, adversity and sorrow shall be no more, what balm would this pour into our wounds, and how would it soften all our evils! Then should we feel the power of that faith, which blunts the sharp sting of adversity, of that triumphant faith that overcomes the world. Even in those scenes of affliction which are the most distressing and affecting to generous and feeling minds, the virtuous sufferer will not sink under his burden: he will shed the tears of friendship and tenderness on his broken connexions; but he will not grieve without a sweet mixture of hope and serenity, from the prospects of religion surmounting the transitory triumphs of death and the grave.

IV. Nevertheless it is still true, that the day of adversity, though susceptible of salutary improvement, is still an evil day, a state of violence painful to nature. It is, in itself, an evil, and never can be deemed good, but

as a bitter remedy to a malignant disease. Therefore, when we have made a wise improvement of it, we are abundantly justified in wishing for its *removal*, and employing the lawful means which wisdom may suggest for that purpose; and this is the last point to be considered.

To obtain deliverance from the day of adversity, or (where this is not practicable) to soften its bitterness and alleviate its evils, is the natural and legitimate desire of man. But whatever the nature of our adversity may be, whether it be public, domestic, or personal, let us be cautious, severely cautious of the *means* we employ to alleviate or to remove it. These means must be lawful and just, in order to be permanently successful and effectual. Injustice may have an apparent and momentary success; but its triumphs are short, and are often compensated by new calamities. The evil generally remains under other forms, when unrighteous means are employed to obtain deliverance. The records of history, and our own observation and experience, if attentively recollected, will shew us, in many and affecting examples, how the blind and

ungoverned passions of men have aggravated their calamities, by the very means which they employed to remove them. *That* can never be true happiness, either *private* or *public*, which is procured by crimes or supported by iniquity. Fortitude and prudence, active industry, and virtuous effort, seconded by a pious recourse to the protection of Heaven, these are the only means which the Christian will think himself permitted to employ, either to throw off or to alleviate his burden.

But above all,—the refuge, the high retreat of the virtuous children of affliction, is the Great Being, under whose supreme direction and controul all human efforts and second causes are immediately placed, and he will grant his Almighty protection to those who have *learned righteousness* by his paternal discipline in the day of adversity. Let us then implore his blessing on our efforts and means, in the present period of our trial: their success must come from him. Does he refuse it to our supplications? We must then conclude that the proper season of deliverance is not yet come, and submit with resignation; *wait-*
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ing for the God of our salvation. His time must be ours; his time alone will be the true and proper season for the accomplishment of our desires. It is enough for us to know, that in the period of our trial his *grace will be sufficient for us*; and that, in the final issue of things, all events *shall work together for good*.

What other resource than this remains for the reflecting and feeling mind, amidst those clouds of terror which hang over this Republic*, and threaten its ruin? While an enemy from without invades its territory, and discord from within consumes its strength, will complaints and murmurs relieve us: or will a brutish insensibility hold out many days longer among some, who seem immersed in a criminal or delirious tranquillity? No, my brethren, murmurs and complaints aggravate suffering; and in the day of adversity, the insensibility contracted by prosperous ease, is soon awakened into terror and anguish. But in all events, there is a high retreat for the righteous in the providence and promises

* *This Discourse was delivered at the HAGUE in November 1794, near the time of the French invasion of the Republic.*

of their God. These are their sanctuary ; and to it they fly, and are safe.—Yes, they are safe ;—their great interests are beyond the reach of the world ; its changes and revolutions cannot affect them essentially. The immortal Child of God, if he knows truly his Father and his Redeemer, will never be dismayed in the most gloomy scenes of human life. He may suffer ; but he will not be confounded. Should the day of adversity come upon him like a whirlwind, his conflict is comparatively short, his victory is sure, and his crown shall be eternal ; for *neither life nor death, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature,* shall separate the good man from the protection and love of that God, in whom *he has believed*, and with whom alone is the fountain of life and happiness eternal.

DISCOURSE XII.

Concerning the respective IMPORTANCE of
PROFESSION and PRACTICE in RELIGION.

MATTHEW, vii. 21.

NOT EVERY ONE THAT SAITH UNTO ME,
LORD, LORD, SHALL ENTER INTO THE
KINGDOM OF HEAVEN, BUT HE THAT
DOETH THE WILL OF MY FATHER,
WHICH IS IN HEAVEN.

RELIGIOUS truth is the light of the soul.

It is a lamp from heaven, designed to direct our steps through this world to a better. But truth, which neither excites pious affections, nor forms virtuous habits, is *useless*, because its purpose is defeated; and it must, sooner or later, become *painful*, because it cannot

cannot cease to be a principle of direction without becoming a source of condemnation. Truth is the friendly guide of those who, like the Psalmist, use it as a *light to their feet*, and a *lamp to their path*; but it has an awful aspect to those who profess to believe the doctrines of religion, while they are little, if at all, solicitous about forming the tenour of their conduct on its sacred precepts. What would you say, in effect, if the declarations of the Gospel announced to such, a sentence of indulgence and absolution, offered to them the prize of our high vocation, and opened to them, indiscriminately, the mansions of felicity beyond the grave? Surely, in such a case, the Gospel would lose that sublime mixture of sanctity and clemency, which constitutes its glory: its author would be the encourager of sin, and the perfections of God would be in contradiction with each other.

We are taught otherwise in the words of our text, which enforce the connexion between truth and duty, profession and practice; and dispel, by a clear and positive declaration, all the illusions which are suggested by corruption, with respect to the necessity and possibility

sibility of obedience to the will of God: they remove the pretexts of the slothful and unworthy servant by a solemn sentence, pronounced even by Him, who came to shed his blood for a sinful world: *Not every one that saith, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doth the will of my Father, which is in Heaven.*

These words are full of important matter. In order, therefore, to illustrate and enforce the practical truths and obligations which they present to us, we shall,

I. Shew what we are to understand by an *entrance into the kingdom of Heaven*, and the *state* and *privileges* which this phrase is designed to express.

II. We shall point out the false pretensions and claims which are made to this *state* and these *privileges* by those who say, *Lord! Lord!* that is, who content themselves with an external profession of religion; and,

III. Shall endeavour to unfold the lines of that character to which these privileges truly belong, even the character of those who *do the will of their Heavenly Father.*

I. We

I. We are to consider, what is meant by an entrance into the *kingdom of heaven*, and the state and privileges which this phrase is designed to express.

The *kingdom of heaven* is generally used in Scripture for the Gospel dispensation, or that kingdom of grace, truth, righteousness, and immortality, which the Son of God came to establish among men, by his ministry, death, and resurrection;—a kingdom whose foundation is laid here, but whose completion shall be carried on hereafter in endless displays of felicity and glory. The true disciple of Christ is a subject of this kingdom; and his state and privileges, resulting from this important relation, present to us several points of view which deserve our serious attention.—Consider the actual state of man, and see how it is ennobled by his prospects as a Christian, a subject of the kingdom of heaven. His actual state, by nature, is marked with three circumstances, which painfully counterbalance all his terrestrial and transitory advantages; for it is a state of *mortality, guilt, and suffering*.

I. It

1. It is a state of mortality. The love of life is the strongest principle in human nature, and yet one of the first things we learn is, that we must die. Nay, in the midst of life, it may be said that *we are in death*, since existence here is not secured to us beyond the present moment. Such is the law of our nature relative to a present world; and though the illusions of fancy and the pleasures and occupations of life put off this evil day, or rather disguise its approach, yet, when considered in itself, it is an object which a reflecting mind cannot behold without dejection and reluctance. But the kingdom of heaven announced in our text dispels its gloom by opening the eye of the Christian on an endless duration. This is one of the first objects which presents itself to his view, when he becomes the disciple of Him, *who has abolished death* by his cross, and *brought life and immortality to a full and certain light by his Gospel*. Here, indeed, a grand prospect is opened to humanity, and a most important privilege is conferred upon the *creature*, which by nature became subject to the *bondage of corruption and death*.

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2. However, if an endless duration, considered in itself, imprints on man a character of grandeur, sin and guilt blast this grandeur, and give it an aspect of terror. Immortality and guilt is an awful compound. Conscience, even in the best, must behold an endless duration with painful anxiety, if there were no promises to relieve and comfort sinful man under those impressions of a righteous government, which, though often overpowered, are rarely extinguished. But while nature is thus, by the consciousness of guilt, disqualified for enjoying fully the prospect of immortality, the grace of the Gospel comes in to its aid, and dispels its anxiety. The Christian who enters into the true spirit of Christ's kingdom sees a dispensation of mercy coming forth, even from the throne of righteousness, in the hands of a Redeemer; and this dispensation, though it brings no relief to the obstinate transgressor, revives the hopes and brightens the prospects of the humble and the penitent.

3. But it was not enough for the King Immortal to vanquish death, and to deliver conscience, in its views of futurity, from those anxious fears which held in bondage the children

children of men. The privileges of his true subjects go still farther: for they are positively encouraged, by a *sure word of promise*, to look hereafter for a total exemption from evil and suffering, and the endless possession of complete felicity. Here the essential wants and longings of nature are satisfied in a manner infinitely surpassing the views which philosophy had exhibited to man, even in its most improved state. For here death appears not only as the final term of suffering and sorrow, but as a short passage to that *fulnefs of joy* which *is in the presence of God, and those rivers of pleasure which flow from his right hand for evermore.*

Such then are the privileges and prospects which are connected with an entrance into the kingdom of heaven. But here we may ask, in the language of the Psalmist, *O Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy place?* There is a negative and also a positive answer made to this question in the words of our text, and they both deserve our serious attention. The first is, *Not every one that saith, Lord! Lord! shall enter into the kingdom of heaven;*—this leads

us to consider the false pretensions and claims which are made to an entrance into the kingdom of God, by those who say, *Lord! Lord!* that is, who content themselves with a merely external profession of religion; and it is the nature and insufficiency of this profession that we shall now consider, in the *second head* of this Discourse.

II. We begin by observing, that a decent external profession of religion is, in a certain degree, respectable, as it is the natural expression of inward piety and virtue. It is not, therefore, to be discouraged, even when unattended with the fruits which ought to accompany it; because it has still a promising aspect, and may prove a mean of real improvement and sanctification. And as it becomes daily less uncommon to see persons throwing off even the appearance of religion, some regard is due to its external profession, where it is not palpably insincere and hypocritical. But even when this profession is sincere, it is not sufficient. No truth, perhaps, ought to be more inculcated than this on the generality of Christians; because if the affectation of irreligion is criminal and audacious,
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the illusions inspired by a more or less sincere profession of Christianity, are highly dangerous; and these illusions are common.

To be clear and explicit on a matter of such high importance, consider the nature of an external profession, compare it with the sacred demands of our vocation, and you will be convinced of its insufficiency. Consider it in its nature, first as it implies an assent to the truths of the Gospel, and secondly as it extends to a careful observance of the positive rites and institutions of religion.

First, as it implies an assent to the truths of the Gospel.—The external professor comes to his Saviour with the confession of his faith, and says unto him, *Lord! Lord!* that is, he acknowledges his religion to be true and divine, and believes its Author to be the Son of God, and the Redeemer of Man. If this historical faith be the effect of a rational conviction, founded on such an attentive examination of the truth as every candid mind is capable of, it is, no doubt, a step of real consequence in religion; but it loses all its importance, if it has little or no influence in directing the conduct and sanctifying the heart. Faith is an

assent to the truths of the Gospel; but for what purpose is an assent to these truths required of us? Is it only that they should be laid up in our memory, and be employed as objects of discussion and barren contemplation, or, as is too often the case, of angry and uncharitable controversy? No, surely; all the great and essential truths of the Gospel have a reference to the improvement of the mind, and to religious and moral conduct; and if they have no real and palpable influence in this respect, the professional belief of them can signify little. When Christ said to his disciples, *Ye shall know the truth**, he adds those remarkable words, *and the truth shall make you free*. Free from what? free (as he explains the phrase himself) from the tyranny of passions and the servitude of sin. And in that mediatorial prayer in favour of his servants, addressed to the Father, he says, *Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth*; by which you see, that it is the essential purpose of the truths of the Gospel, seconded by divine succours, to purify the

* John, viii. 37.

hearts and direct the actions of men.—If, therefore, while we say *Lord! Lord!* in consequence of an external profession of the truth, this truth does not excite our grateful love to our Saviour and our God, and render this love a principle of obedience; if it neither obtains an empire over our sensual appetites, nor softens the animosity of our angry and vindictive passions; if it neither humbles our pride at the view of our demerit, nor modifies ambition by the restraints of humanity and justice; if it neither diminishes the rapacity of avarice and self-love, nor nourishes in the heart the godlike habits of charity and beneficence; if it neither removes our narrow prejudices, nor corrects our weak and capricious humours, nor prevents our rash and uncharitable judgments; finally, if it neither raises our predominant views and desires beyond this world, nor puts our minds into a frame of sanctity and benevolence which prepares them for a better;—what purposes does such a profession of the truth serve, but to deceive us with respect to our essential and eternal interests? Let none deceive themselves in this momentous concern, where mistakes and self-

delusion are so fatal. Christianity was designed to improve our nature; but a mere external profession degrades it, by throwing our corruption under a mask, which sometimes deceives even ourselves, and thus leaves corruption in all its power.

Secondly, Still more delusive is that branch of an external profession mentioned above, which consists in a careful observance of the positive rites and institutions of religion. For an external profession is not merely an assent to truth, but comprehends also positive acts of religion, and a regular attendance on the stated institutions of public worship. These external services are undoubtedly precious means of sanctification and virtue. When we come into the house of God, the objects which, of all others, are the most adapted to affect and better our hearts, are there presented to our view. We come professedly to fix all our attention on these objects. Our worldly occupations are suspended, that nothing may prevent the solemn and pleasing impressions which they are adapted to make upon our minds. We present ourselves before the Being, whose grandeur asto-

nishes, whose justice awes, whose goodness and mercy encourage and console, who fills immensity, and yet condescends to dwell with the contrite heart. We come to hear the word, which tells us that we are immortal, holds forth a lamp to guide us in the path of life, and presents to us a Redeemer to prevent our being dejected by a sense of guilt, by the terrors of death, or by the prospect of judgment. We come to read and hear those divine precepts which *rejoice the heart*, and make the *simple wise*. We approach to the table of the Lord, and are assured there, that there is pardon for the penitent, strength for the feeble, and life eternal for the dying creature. Such are the purposes for which we come professedly into the house of God. But how do many return from thence to the world? They return like *a man who beholdeth his face in a glass, and then goeth away and forgetteth what manner of man he was* *. The impressions made by the public services of religion (if impressions there have been) are often momentary; and daily observation shews

* James, i. 23, 24.

that they neither fortify against temptation, nor support under trial, nor animate to duty ; it shews that men may pass their lives in a regular observance of religious institutions, and yet still remain proud, voluptuous, envious, avaricious, and unjust, equally unaffected by the goodness of God, and the consideration of his righteous and awful government. *This people serve me with their lips, saith the Lord by the mouth of his prophet, but their hearts are far from me.* Now, surely, where the external services of religion leave us as they found us, and our predominant passions, humours, and violations of duty, go on uncorrected in the same irregular train, it cannot be said that such services answer the purpose of their institution, nor, indeed, any good purpose at all. On the contrary, they aggravate our guilt in an awful manner, because they are salutary means of grace criminally misimproved. It is thus that the precious privileges and blessings of the Gospel dispensation are unhappily forfeited ; for it would be strange to imagine that these privileges and blessings were connected with the performance of external services, which

which are accompanied with no fruits of righteousness; that pardon should be given to the persevering offender; and that the regions of purity and love should be indiscriminately opened to the pure and the impure, the vindictive and the merciful, to those who trample upon the laws of God, and those who serve him in sincerity and truth. This is not the design of that holy and merciful Saviour, *who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from our iniquities, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works* *.

It is not meant, however, by any thing hitherto advanced on this subject, to invalidate the promises of merciful indulgence, which are made to sincere, though still imperfect piety, by Him *who knows our frame, and considers that we are but dust*. In this present state of our frail humanity, all instances of inconsistency and contradiction between faith and practice cannot be entirely avoided, and in some cases they will even be found in true and advanced Christians. These contradictions make a part of our state of

* Titus, ii. 14.

trial: they are adapted to exercise our pious activity in surmounting them; and to improve our intellectual and moral powers, by continual efforts to *add to our faith and virtue*, that we may not be found *barren and unfruitful in the day of the Lord Jesus*. But when we take no pains to remove these contradictions, by subjecting the influence of sense and passions to the controul of reason and faith, our profession is dishonoured, its privileges are forfeited; because, though we may say, *Lord! Lord!* to our Divine Master, we say this with a spirit of disaffection.

To what we have already observed, with respect to the insufficiency of an external profession, however solemn and specious it may be, we cannot help adding, that there is a high degree of *superstition* in the confidence which many place in it. This is peculiarly shameful and criminal, considering the dispensation of light and knowledge under which we live. Cast an eye back on those periods of the world, in which the darkness and errors of Paganism degraded the human mind. There you see smoking altars, crowded temples, costly sacrifices, and laborious rites,
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accompanying vicious morals and unrestrained corruption. Yet, even in this dismal period of ignorance and superstition, reason suggested purer notions of religion to some of the Pagan sages. They considered an upright and virtuous heart as the most acceptable oblation that we can present to the Deity ; and maintained, that they honour and glorify him best, who endeavour to resemble him. Whether it was reason or tradition that taught them this sublime and important truth, it has been repeatedly confirmed by Divine Revelation. It is impossible to use more precautions against the illusions of human corruption on this head, than have been taken by the writers of those sacred books, which are the great and essential sources of our consolation, and ought therefore to be the chief rule of our conduct. See how they admonish the Jews, who placed such confidence in a barren profession ! The language, addressed to them by the Prophets of the Most High, is, *Bring no more vain oblations (i. e. offerings, which neither purify the heart nor reform the life). To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me, saith the Lord?—Your*

new moons, sabbaths, and solemn assemblies, are a profanation.—When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you. But cease to do evil, learn to do well; and then, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.*

We have, in the words following our text, a signal proof of the insufficiency of every thing, but purity of heart and life, to render us genuine disciples of Christ, and the true subjects of his kingdom of grace and glory. For not only they, who *say Lord! Lord!* by a mere external profession, are excluded from this kingdom, but even they, also, who held a distinguished rank in the church, by their extensive knowledge, their splendid and even miraculous gifts, are declared unworthy subjects of the kingdom of Christ; because their conduct was not answerable to their profession. *Many will say, in that day, (the day of judgment,) Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name done many wondrous works?* The answer is, *I never knew you,* (that is, acknowledged you for my faithful

* Isaiah, i. 18.

servants,)

servants,) *depart from me ye workers of iniquity.* God may employ, in the dispensation of the Gospel, as he does in the government of Providence, unworthy instruments in the execution of his designs; because it is his glorious province to draw good out of evil, and to direct the faculties and passions, even of the unrighteous, to promote, in the issue of things, the purposes of his goodness and mercy. But at the great day of accounts such instruments will be rejected. Men may defend the truth of the Gospel, with great acuteness of judgment and extent of knowledge, without feeling in their hearts, or manifesting in their lives its sanctifying power and its moral influence. It is by their fruits that true Christians must be discerned. *If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.* This is the indispensable law of *grace*, as well as of reason, otherwise the law of grace would be in direct opposition to the nature of God, the nature of man, and the nature of things. It is *he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven*, saith our Blessed Lord, that shall enter into the kingdom of
grace

grace and glory. What is implied in *doing this will*, we propose to consider in a following Discourse.

In the mean time, let us consider, with an eye of recollection turned upon ourselves, what has been already observed with respect to the insufficiency of services, merely external, to answer the purposes of our high vocation. Let us consider seriously the obligations of our Christian profession, and the manner in which we fulfil them. The case of those, who are insensible both of its sacred and pleasing duties, and of its sublime and immortal promises and prospects, is truly deplorable; their guilt, and its consequences, must be awful; for *how can they escape, who so fatally neglect such a great salvation?*—— But inexpressibly happy are they, who, awakened from a criminal indifference, look upon religion as a serious and momentous thing; who behold in it a comforter and a guide; who *taste the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come*. They, indeed, will look with self-abasement upon the disproportion that there is between the
means

means they have enjoyed and their improvement of them; but their candid view of this disproportion will diminish it from day to day; and their Heavenly Father will not only *consider their frame* with paternal mercy, but also *perfect* his victorious strength in their infirmity.

DISCOURSE XIII.

The same Subject continued.

MATTHEW, vii. 21.

NOT EVERY ONE THAT SAITH UNTO ME,
LORD, LORD, SHALL ENTER INTO THE
KINGDOM OF HEAVEN, BUT HE THAT
DOETH THE WILL OF MY FATHER,
WHICH IS IN HEAVEN.

IN the preceding Discourse, we considered, first, what is to be understood by an *entrance into the kingdom of heaven*, and the privileges which are comprehended in that phrase. We exposed, secondly, the fatal illusions of those, who found their claims to these privileges and blessings upon a merely external profession of religion.

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We now proceed to shew, in the third place, that the blessings of the kingdom of grace and glory belong only to those *who do the will of their Heavenly Father*, and to illustrate and ascertain the sense and import of that phrase.

To do the will of God is an expression of momentous import, which, too often, is lamentably reduced, by indolence and corruption, to vague resolutions and feeble efforts. This will, so far as it is manifested, must always have been, and must always be, the supreme source of obligation, and the great rule of conduct to all intelligent and moral beings. As essentially righteous and good, its authority is respectable and sacred: and as the will of our Creator, Preserver, Benefactor, and Judge, its obligation is both attracting and awful. The highest angels obey this will; for order is their delight, and this will is the source of order. Human nature, in its primitive state, whose duration is not precisely marked in Holy Writ, obeyed this will, and then anxiety and pain, the tumult of passions, disgust in false enjoyment, and remorse of conscience, were unknown. But when hu-
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man nature fell from its integrity, then pure and unmixed happiness fled from the abodes of mortals. The mind lost its hope and its peace, and both mental disorder and bodily suffering shewed the fatal effects of iniquity; and it was in the most deplorable period of human depravity and misery that the Son of God appeared upon earth, to seek and to save that which was lost.

But he did not come to save the guilty, that they might continue in sin. He did not proclaim mercy and reconciliation from his cross, that ingratitude and disobedience might trample upon goodness, through the hope of impunity.—No :—obedience was the ultimate end of redemption, and the merciful Author of that redemption snatches the penitent sinner from destruction, that he *may turn from his unrighteousness and live*. For this purpose the *voice came out of Sion*, which, while it offered mercy and pardon to sinful man, proclaimed to him, at the same time, in the Gospel of Jesus, a sacred rule of moral conduct and republished the *will of God*. He, that *came forth from the Father*, displayed the Divine perfections to the world in all their attracting

attracting lustre and awful grandeur, and inculcated the great duties of the love of God, resignation to his wisdom, and submission to his authority, with such clearness and simplicity, as were adapted to enlighten the ignorant, to affect the learned, and to place the worship of the Supreme Being upon the purest and most rational foundations.—He unfolded the duties of benevolence, justice, and mercy to our fellow-creatures, as the great laws of God's moral empire, and of his peculiar kingdom of grace. He enforced the obligations of temperance, humility, patience, and contentment in the strongest manner.

Thus the sacred and unchangeable rule of religious and moral conduct was renewed to man: and this rule, whose jurisdiction extends to our words and actions, to our affections and intentions, in every condition of life, and in all the relations in which we are placed, *is the will of God*.—God can only *will* that which is good, and man can neither be accepted nor happy in the omission of good and in the pursuit of evil; and this consideration is sufficient to shew us, that they, who would *enter into the kingdom of God*, and
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aspire after the promises and prospects it holds forth, must *do the will* of their Heavenly Father.

A great and important question remains.—When may we be said to *do the will of God*? Or, in other words, What does this expression comprehend and imply? This, though a very important question, and one whose solution is so essential to the well-founded tranquillity of man, is too rarely an object of attention and concern, even among professed Christians. Some live without reflexion on their characters, sentiments, and actions, and hurry through life, in a thoughtless manner, as passion and imagination lead them. This is a kind of folly, highly criminal in a reasonable and immortal being, to whom happiness or misery are exhibited in awful prospect at the end of a transitory life. Others trust in vague notions of the mercy of God, or place their hopes of acceptance in that covenant of grace and pardon which was ratified by the death and resurrection of our Blessed Lord. But if this be, no doubt, a comfortable source of tranquillity, it is not such to those, who forget that there *is forgiveness*

giveness with God, that he may be feared, and that the Redeemer of the world holds forth, in one hand, an act of mercy, and in the other, a law of life.

Avoiding these fatal illusions, let us return to the important question,—What is implied in *doing the will of God*? We answer, in general, and negatively, not any thing beyond the reach of sincere effort and Divine succours.—It has been disingenuously objected to Christian morality, that its precepts are of too refined and exalted a nature to be practicable by man, and that they are not suited to the imperfection and infirmities of human nature in its present state. Our first answer removes this objection. But we ask, in our turn, What are the precepts which are above human effort and Divine succours? or, Where is the precept that has not, in effect, been reduced to practice by good men in all ages of the Christian church? There is no doubt that, in many cases and circumstances, obedience to the will of God has, to a weak and corrupt nature, great difficulties. Though the Law of the Lord be right, *rejoicing the heart*; though the increasing habit of obedi-

ence in a virtuous mind be productive of a pure and permanent pleasure; yet, in some, passions unsubdued, and bad habits, more or less inveterate, excite a painful conflict between appetite and reason, inclination and conscience. And, accordingly, St. Paul observes, that the flesh lusteth *against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; and that these are contrary the one to the other*. But if that be deemed unreasonably severe, which opposes any irregular inclination or any vicious habit, what, we beseech you, will at last be regarded as reasonable? The inclinations of men are so various, that every virtue and every duty will, by one or another, be complained of as a rigorous restraint, and thus the whole moral law will be considered as an intolerable burden. The vindictive will plead against the law of love and mercy;—the voluptuous and sensual will complain of the law of temperance;—the miser will object to the law of beneficence;—and those who live in a whirlwind of dissipation, trifling, and folly, will complain of a law, that fixes our purposes, and leads us to aim, with assiduity and zeal, at such ends as ascertain the dignity of human

human nature, and, at the proper season, will infallibly render it glorious and happy. If such objectors require a law, which is neither designed to regulate their affections and desires, nor to influence their conduct and make them wiser and better, than a criminal inclination, corrupt indolence, or a vicious taste dispose them to be ; then, indeed, the *will of God* cannot be their rule.—But after all,—the question is not, What the folly of man would require? but, What the wisdom of God has thought fit to prescribe?—The question is not, Whether there are inevitable difficulties attending duty and obedience in this short state of trial? (difficulties, whose conquest is attended with the sweetest fruits, and shall be followed by eternal felicity,) but, Whether obedience to the will of God be necessary to *an entrance into the kingdom of heaven*, and what is properly implied *in doing his will*? It implies, positively, *four things* ; which we shall consider in their order.

It implies, *first*, a fixed *intention and purpose* to serve the best of Beings, and to improve ourselves to him in the whole course of our conduct and conversation. Neither

temerity nor diffidence ought to enter into the formation of this solemn purpose. In opposition to levity and temerity, it must be calm and deliberate ; and, in opposition to diffidence, it must be firm and resolute. Animated by a persuasion of the truth of religion, of the importance of its doctrines, precepts, and promises, and of the solemn interest we have, both here and hereafter, in the approbation and protection of its great Author, it will be zealous and permanent, while a consciousness of our infirmities will, at the same time, render it humble and modest. It is thus that faith, rising beyond a barren and merely external profession, will make the true Christian adopt, with sensibility, the vow of the Psalmist, *Truly, Lord, I am thy servant;—I delight to do thy will, O my God! yea thy law is within my heart.*

Secondly, To do the will of God implies a *careful and impartial inquiry* into what that will requires from us in the way of duty. This is the natural consequence of a firm intention and purpose to serve the best of Beings. In order to follow a rule, we must know what it prescribes ; and veneration and love for the Being, whose *service is the most perfect*

perfect freedom, will render his faithful servants attentive to every manifestation of his will and pleasure. These will prevent precipitation in acting, and will lead the true Christian to examine with care what is the *good and acceptable will* of his Heavenly Father. He will not be *afraid* (as too many are) to know this will, even when he may have reason to apprehend that it will be unfavourable to the sentiments he has adopted, and the views and propensities which have the greatest ascendant in his mind.—More especially, he will employ a particular and habitual attention in applying the maxims and precepts of the Gospel to his own character, passions, relations, and circumstances. This will prevent his condemning in others what he is disposed to excuse in himself, and will render truly the word of God *a light to his feet and a lamp to his path*.

So far, however, the Christian is only prepared for doing the will of his Heavenly Father; for this implies essentially, in *the third place*, serious and *vigorous efforts* to avoid whatever the law of God forbids, and to perform what it commands. However plain

this may appear, it is *here* that the illusions of men are frequent and peculiarly dangerous to the religious and moral state of the mind. These illusions are various. There are illusions with respect to sincerity; for some think themselves sincere in their attachment to duty, if their imagination is pleasingly affected by the noble and lovely form of religion, and they applaud virtue when it is practised by others. But this is a dangerous error. Sincerity is not only opposed to hypocrisy, but also to a corrupt indolence; and it supposes ardour and activity in the practice of duty. There are also illusions equally dangerous, which relate to the extent of our obedience to the Divine will, as when favourite passions, unjustifiable omissions, and vicious habits are excepted in our resolutions and efforts of obedience. Hence arise those motly mixtures of vice and virtue, which we often meet with in the characters of men;—mixtures which give reason to fear, that while the vices are real, the virtues are, at best, but ambiguous. It is certain, that a cordial attachment and submission to the will of God can never admit of exceptions and reserves in favour of
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what that holy will has declared to be sinful. *Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto ALL thy commandments.* This is the language of sincerity, and sincerity is (if I may use that expression) the main spring of active and zealous efforts. The Christian is not exempted from infirmities and lapses in his virtuous course; but he will not *habitually* and *deliberately* turn aside from it in any instance of known duty. He will watch over his heart in every instance of temptation and trial; he will respect every command as indispensable and sacred, which comes from his Heavenly Father. He will raise an eye of ardent supplication for succour to the throne of Grace, to enable him to subdue every passion which opposes the will of his God, and wars against the peace of his mind. He will employ every motive, which faith and hope, love and fear suggest, to call forth the latent powers of the soul; and thus ardent efforts, excited by views of what is great, beautiful, and important, in religion, will animate him to a zealous and universal obedience.

Thirdly, The good man, who proposes it as the great end of his being to *do the will of God,*

God, will not be contented with any progress he may have made in piety and virtue, but will still be desirous of farther improvement. A pious ambition will make him *press forward to the mark, adding to his faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, and brotherly love, that he may not be barren nor unfruitful in the day of the Lord Jesus*. As he comes nearer to the term of his trial and the enjoyment of his crown, shall he relax his pace and faint in his journey? Shall he set limits to his obedience, the nearer that he advances to those blessed regions, of which obedience, without reserve, constitutes the divine freedom and felicity? No;—he will *go on in his way, rejoicing in hope*, and happy and glorious will be the conclusion of his course.

Thus have we endeavoured to point out the essential lines of religious and moral duty, which are comprehended in *doing the will of God*.——It is not to be expected, that these lines of obedience will be possessed in the same degree of purity and improvement by all who profess the Gospel of Christ. Different are the circumstances and capacities of men; different are their means and measures
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of grace ; and it was not required by the gracious and equitable Master, that the servant who had received but *one* talent should come with an improvement equal to that of the man who had received *five*. But the characters of obedience already described are, in a certain degree, essential to *true* obedience in all. If any plead, with respect to religious obedience, an incapacity, the very suspicion of which would affront them in the most difficult affairs of the world ;—if they plead ignorance, while the light of heaven yet blazes around them, and complain of the want of means in the midst of their abundance, their case seems fatal, but it is inexcusable. The repeated declarations of the Gospel assure us, that we shall be *judged by our works*, if not as titles of merit, yet as marks of that sanctification without which *no man can see the Lord*. Faith saves, by furnishing the strongest motives to obedience ; and obedience displays the life, the power, and efficacy of faith. Their separation is fatal, and destroys both : their union is the life, peace, and felicity of the soul. Let us carry these things home to ourselves,

ourselves, and apply them conscientiously to our respective cases.

We shut the *kingdom of heaven* upon none; but unhappy they who shut it upon themselves! For the External Wisdom calls out to man, *Be not deceived: God is not mocked; for as a man sows, so also shall he reap.*—And even the merciful Redeemer, who died upon the cross for the sins of men, declares that the day shall come when he will say to many, *I know ye not: depart from me, ye that do iniquity.* What an awful sentence, coming from Him who opened the source of mercy to mankind! But against whom is it pronounced? Not against the contrite sinner, whom a sincere repentance brings to the fountain of mercy and salvation, and who, though amidst much imperfection, desires and endeavours to *do the will* of his Heavenly Father:—nor against those, whose failings in duty are repaired by redoubled diligence, and who run with perseverance the *race that is set before them*, with waiting eyes, raised to the Great *Author and Finisher of their faith*. No;—it is pronounced against those who have never fixed
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it as their *great purpose* in life, to serve the Author of their being, but live at random, as their passions, fancies, and sensual appetites lead them. It is also pronounced against those who, though not chargeable with enormous transgressions, live in the indolent, voluntary, and habitual omission of essential duties, whose lives are a blank, on which no palpable characters of virtue are inscribed;—and *that* in a state of discipline, manifestly designed for moral and religious improvement, and preparatory to a future and eternal state.—We speak not of those still more enormous transgressors, who affront all laws, human and divine, and seem even to reject the profession of Christianity, by their careless, contemptuous neglect of the ordinances and institutions of public worship: such do not come within the compass of our subject; for it relates only to those who, by saying, *Lord! Lord!* profess an attachment to the truths of religion, and its Divine Author.

O ye who *set the Lord before you*, to do his will, how happy is your state, compared both with that of the desperate infidel, who rejects the truth, and that of the unworthy professor,

who *holds it in unrighteousness*? Your course and your destination are honourable and glorious. They add new dignity to your elevation, if Providence has placed you in the higher ranks of human life; and should your obscurity conceal you from the eyes of the world, their pure and permanent, though disguised lustre shall one day break forth into eternal splendour and glory. You serve the King of kings: you are the objects of his favour; and his favour is neither impotent nor transitory; it is permanent and almighty. There is an amazing dignity in your condition, though the eye of sense cannot perceive it. You are subjects of a kingdom, which has its commencement in time, and its completion in eternity;—a moral and spiritual kingdom, which shall flourish in full glory when the kingdoms of this world shall have passed like a vision, and their places *shall know them no more*. —My brethren, there is no spectacle equal in dignity and excellence to that of the good man who *does the will of God*, with an eye raised to immortality, and his confidence fixed on the promises of Him who is the faithful and the true.

Go on, then, in your way rejoicing, servant of the Most High, for your labour shall not be in vain. Every pious sentiment you nourish, every virtuous deed you perform, will be new steps towards perfection. And the day shall, at length, come, when heaven and earth, resounding the praises of religious virtue, shall transport you with the consciousness of your happy condition. The day shall come, when self-condemned and dejected sinners shall behold, with astonishment, your triumph, and be amazed at *the strangeness of your salvation* *. They *accounted your life as folly, and esteemed your end without honour*; but they shall see you *numbered among the children of God, and your lot among the saints for ever*.

* Wisdom, v. 2, & *passim*.

DISCOURSE XIV.

On the NATURE, EXTENT, and IMPORT-
ANCE of the LOVE of God.

MATTHEW, xxii. 37.

JESUS SAID UNTO HIM, THOU SHALT
LOVE THE LORD, THY GOD, WITH ALL
THY HEART, AND WITH ALL THY
SOUL, AND WITH ALL THY MIND.

THERE is no subject of religious meditation more noble, affecting, and important than that which is presented to us in these words ; but also there is none, on which we ought to be more upon our guard against the illusions of fancy and the influence of a constitutional fervour. It is certain, however, that we are formed to *feel*, as well as to *judge*,
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and the contemplation and pursuit of truth are not more essential to the true improvement of human nature, than a taste for what is good, praise-worthy, and excellent, and the love of those characters in which these amiable qualities are displayed. Nay, it is this taste, cultivated and improved by an attention to its proper objects, which renders human nature susceptible of true felicity. Without it reason would be merely a speculative faculty; for it would neither excite to action nor administer enjoyment, if the objects it discovered awakened no pleasing feelings, nor gave exercise to any generous affections. The improvement of the understanding may form the philosopher and render him learned; but the warm and well-governed feelings of the heart constitute the Christian and render him happy. He says with the Psalmist, *O how I love thy law! it is my meditation all the day. My meditation of thee shall be sweet, I will be glad in the Lord.*

It is true, that all feelings and affections, however refined, have, when carried to a certain degree of fervour, some kind of connection with our material frame. They are, also, not

inaccessible to the influence of imagination, and, therefore, if not under the controul and direction of right reason, may degenerate into enthusiasm. It is well known that the love of God, the most noble and reasonable of all affections, has been sometimes disfigured by passing through the irregular fancies of men; and while, to the reproach of the reasonable nature, this pious affection is little cultivated in the minds of some, it is perverted and degraded, in others, by sentiments and ideas that do not belong to it. To be guarded against all these,—against the coldness of an unfeeling heart on the one hand, and the visions of an ungoverned fancy on the other, let us consider the sublime duty of our text, in the three following points of view.

First, in its object and its nature, *thou shalt love the Lord thy God*; where we shall consider the foundation and the essential properties of this pious affection.

Secondly, in its extent, as it is expressed in these words, *with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind*.

Thirdly, in its high importance,—this is *the first and great commandment*.

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I. We are to consider the love of God, both in its foundation and also in the essential characters which distinguish this noble and pious affection.

1. The love of God is founded on the excellence of the Divine nature, considered in itself, and on the affecting relations which the greatest and best of Beings has condescended to assume with respect to us. Of the *nature* of God, which exhibits to us sanctity, wisdom, justice, and power, in infinite perfection, goodness is the attractive and crowning attribute. It sheds its lustre over all the rest, and finishes the glory of the Divine character. Goodness is the immediate object of love, and cannot be contemplated deliberately, by the human mind, without pleasure and delight. It is the very essence of moral excellence. Consider, how we are affected by goodness, even in the imperfect manifestations of it in the characters and conduct of viruous men! It excites in the heart of the ingenuous observer the most pleasing impressions of approbation and love. The affection of the heart belongs peculiarly (if I may use that expression) to those lines of character, in which we discern benignity, dis-

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interestedness, and mercy. And when these qualities are accompanied with integrity, temperance, and wisdom, which are also the objects of approbation, in their own nature, the love of goodness in such characters is still heightened, and is blended with esteem and veneration. Now, if we admire the feeble shades of goodness, sanctity, and wisdom, which we discern in imperfect mortals, how ought we to be affected by these qualities, as they are possessed by the Supreme Mind in infinite perfection? If we admire the borrowed streams, shall we behold with a criminal indifference, the eternal fountain from whence they flow? The nature of God, whose wisdom is a compound of knowledge and goodness, and whose omnipotence is only the instrument of promoting the wise, the righteous, the benevolent purposes of his eternal empire, lay the true foundations for the duty of our text.

We need not enumerate the proofs of that goodness by which the Supreme Being is entitled to our love. They shine forth in the universal frame of nature, which carries the palpable and permanent marks of the wisdom

dom and benignity of its author. They predominate, with majesty and splendor, amidst the temporary evils and disorders incident to mankind in this first state of their existence, which is a preparatory state of discipline and trial for a higher and more permanent destination. These evils are permitted for reasons which we now see only in part, but shall perceive fully at the proper season, when that *which is perfect shall come, and that which is in part shall be done away* *. But we may see, even at present, in the peculiar and affecting relations, which the Supreme Being condescends to assume with respect to us, manifestations of benignity, which, besides the intrinsic excellence of his nature, are every way proper to excite our love. Consider this glorious Being, as the author of our existence, who has made man *but a little lower than the angels*, by endowing him with reason and immortality, and thus rendering him susceptible of high improvements in knowledge and virtue through an endless duration. Consider that providential goodness, which renders all the

* 1 Cor. xiii. 10.

elements and powers of nature instrumental in our preservation from day to day, and subservient to the supply of our various wants. Consider what that glorious Being has done to heal or soften the temporary evils of a present life, and even to deprive *sin* of its mortal sting and *death* of its terrors. Behold him in redemption and grace. Here he declares himself the *Lord merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness, pardoning the transgressions* of the humble and the penitent. Here he mitigates the awful lines of his character as judge of the world, blends with them the mild rays of paternal benignity, receives the prodigal, but penitent, son into the arms of his protection and mercy, bears with long-suffering patience the infirmities of his children, and offers the powerful succours of his spirit to maintain their perseverance in the paths of virtue. Consider, finally, this supreme Creator, this providential Benefactor, this merciful Father, opening the mansions of life eternal, by the Son of his love, and pointing out, by a positive and transporting promise, a glorious and amazing period, when sin and suffering shall cease for ever, and his servants

vants and children shall rejoice in his empire and partake of his felicity through the endless ages. In these views of the Supreme Being, the attentive mind will perceive the noblest foundations laid for the exercise of its love, and find every thing that is adapted to excite and nourish this pious and elevated affection; and it is here that the feeling heart will adopt the language of the Psalmist, and say, *whom have I in heaven but thee? and what is there upon the earth that I can desire beside thee? I will love thee, O Lord, my strength and the rock of my salvation.*

2. But if the foundation of the duty of our text is evident, it is of importance to form just ideas of this duty, that we may practise it with propriety, and enjoy, in reality, its inestimable fruits. We have hinted already, that, as the irregular fancies and passions of men have abused the best things, so mystical enthusiasm has been imposed upon the world under the specious denomination of divine love. We shall now therefore consider the nature and point out the distinctive marks and characters of the love of God.

And here we may observe in general, that this noble affection, when founded on rational and enlightened conceptions of its great object, is calm in its tenour, yet powerful in its effects. It is not fiery like enthusiasm, nor turbulent like the movements of sense and passion. It is, indeed, a fervent affection, but its fervour is of a kind that permits the soul to be sedate and serene in its highest exercise. Its vivacity is tempered by profound respect, and its ardour, when it grows too forward, is modified by a reflexion on the majesty of its equally awful and amiable object. “The
“love of God therefore (as far as we can
“comprehend it in a general definition) is an
“habitual, affectionate, and respectful attach-
“ment of the heart to the greatest and best
“of Beings, arising from a just and lively
“sense of his excellence and goodness, as they
“are displayed in nature, providence, and
“grace, and expressing itself suitably in our
“lives and actions.”

Now from this general definition several distinct branches of piety naturally arise, and the love of God manifests itself in various forms
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and aspects, according to the different points of view, in which we consider the Supreme Being, whether in his own *intrinsic excellence*, or in the *relations* he has assumed with *respect to us*.

1. The love of God, when we consider it as arising from a view of the intrinsic excellence of the divine nature, comprehends *veneration*. This is inspired by the union of grandeur with benignity, and it has a boundless exercise in the contemplation of a Being, in whom resides a full and complete assemblage of all that is great, good, excellent, and happy. With this is connected an exalted kind of pleasure in the contemplation of such a Being. In our connexions in life we have a very refined and animated kind of satisfaction in the view of great and good characters, and the corruption of those must be extreme who behold them with indifference. How great then, how exalted must the satisfaction of a pious mind be in the contemplation of that great Being, who is the object of its love? This pleasure, which the Christian feels with peculiar sensibility, when he attends to that declaration of an inspired apostle, that *God is love*,

love, is the vital spirit of true devotion. It gives the mind a high relish for religious worship, and makes it adopt the language of the Psalmist, when he said, *one day in thy courts is better than a thousand—How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord! blessed are they that dwell in thy house* *! *My meditation of thee shall be sweet; I will be glad in the Lord* †. Again,

2. The love of God must be naturally accompanied with a *high sense of the value of his favour, and a desire of obtaining it*. In human life, our desire of the favour and approbation of others rises in proportion to the persuasion we have of their merit, and to our esteem for their characters. If therefore we love God truly, must it not be our highest ambition to obtain a place in his approbation, and shall we not say, in the sincerity of our hearts, with the Psalmist, *Thy favour, O Lord! is better than life?*

3. And when, after contemplating the Supreme Being in the intrinsic excellence of his nature, we consider him in the *relations* which he bears to us in providence and grace, as our

* Psalm lxxxiv.

† Psalm civ. 34.

preserver, benefactor, and merciful Father, then love not only grows more fervent, but expands itself in a variety of congenial sentiments, which are equally pleasing and improving to the heart. Here it assumes the form of pious *gratitude*. The Christian comes into the presence of his *God with thanksgiving, and enters his courts with praise*. He *stirs up all that is within him to magnify and bless his Redeemer and benefactor*. When he reflects upon the gifts imparted to him in the dispensations of providence and grace, and looks forward to the blessings secured to him, in an endless duration, by the promises of him who is *the faithful and the true witness*, he says, with emotion, *What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits* *?

4. In this view of the Supreme Being, love humbly assumes the serene and cheerful character of trust and *confidence*. Imperfect, precarious, and in many respects, humiliating, is the present condition of man considered in himself. Wants, anxieties, and cares, surround him, as a dependent being: Apprehensions

* Psalm civ.

alarm him as a sinner; and he is exposed to perpetual dangers and vicissitudes in this transitory world. It is in this situation that an adequate object of confidence is necessary to his tranquillity and hope. God is that object; and the love of God, as already described, inspires that humble confidence, which *casteth out* anxiety and *fear*. This confidence, which flows directly from the love of God, as its source, is confirmed by the positive promise, *that all things shall work together for good to those that love God* *. The more the love of God prevails in our hearts, the more will it resolve our wills into the divine will, and strengthen our confidence in the merciful designs of God towards us, and in the prospect of a happy issue to our anxieties and sorrows. And as this love excites confidence in the good man's heart with respect to the happy issue of his severest trials, so also, of consequence, does it, by a mild but powerful influence, sustain his resignation in the period of suffering. In the dark moments of affliction and adversity, the love of God and placid

* Rom. viii. 28.

resignation may be considered as one and the same affection. If you separate resignation from the love of the great and good Being, who forms *the light and creates darkness*, it loses its beauty, nay, its very essence, and becomes an involuntary and servile submission. Resignation is the love of God, smoothing the brow of affliction, alleviating the bitterness of injuries, softening the hardships of poverty, putting God in the place of the friends we lose, and setting him and his promises before us in all the calamities and trials we are called to endure. All this is expressed with great beauty and energy in the prayer which an inspired prophet addressed to God under a dark and awful dispensation of Providence. *Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine, the labour of the olive shall fail and the fields shall yield no meat, the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation**. From what principles can such language proceed, but from the love of the great and good Being who is

* Hab. iii. 17, 18.

the dispenser of our lot, and from the hope and confidence which this noble affection inspires?

5. We observe farther, that the desire of resembling the best of Beings, (though it must always be at an immense distance,) is a feeling truly congenial and connected with the love of God. It is not possible for the human mind to love and admire sincerely any excellent and attainable quality, without desiring to be possessed of it. This desire, indeed, will have different degrees of vigour and warmth, in human characters, according to the respective degrees of their religious knowledge and moral improvement; but piteous, truly, is the case of those in whom this desire is dormant or languid! It is certain, that admiration and love, exercised towards shining displays of goodness and wisdom, elevate the mind, and excite a desire of imitating the object in which they appear. *As for me, (saith the Psalmist,) I will behold thy face in righteousness, and I will be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.*

I need not, therefore, observe farther, that the love of God is not merely an internal affection,

fection, which lies unactive in the mind, but the powerful and vigorous principle of a voluntary and cheerful obedience. This obedience is the proper effect of the love of God, and shall be considered in its place. In the mean time, we shall conclude with a few inferences, deducible from what has been already said on this subject.

First, then, by the account we have given of the nature and foundation of the duty of our text, it will be easy to decide a question, which has been discussed with much more subtilty than good sense, namely, Whether or not the love of God is to be considered as a *disinterested* affection? No such question could ever have been proposed, but from partial or confused notions of this important subject. If you consider the love of God, as that pious sentiment of veneration and complacence, which the wisdom and goodness of the Supreme Being, considered in themselves, excite in the mind, this affection is absolutely disinterested. No prospect of advantage can make us esteem a being whom we do not think worthy of esteem: it may induce us to speak a language foreign to our hearts; but it cannot engage

engage us to love and respect what our minds have not previously judged respectable and lovely. But when we consider the Supreme Being in the endearing relations of our *Benefactor*, *Redeemer*, and heavenly *Father*, then is it true, that, in the exercise of gratitude, resignation, and hope, a pious and rational self-love which aspires after felicity and perfection, mingles itself with our love to the best of Beings.

A second, and still more important, inference from what has been said on this interesting subject, is the necessity of an attentive study of the divine perfections, as they are displayed in nature, providence, and grace, in order to our possessing truly and exercising properly the delightful affection of love to God. Unless we know, in a certain degree, what God is, and in what respects he is worthy of our love, it is impossible that we can have any suitable regard for him at all. Without this knowledge, our love must be a blind, enthusiastical principle, neither honourable to its glorious object nor salutary to our own souls. Most certainly our love to God will be more or less pure, rational, and fervent, in proportion

tion as our knowledge and views of his perfections are more or less extensive. They that know thee, Eternal Source of light and love! will love thee above all things, and still perceive that their love comes infinitely short of the awful and delightful regard, which is due to thy sublime perfections. They will consider thy *service* as the most perfect freedom, and thy favour as better than life and all its enjoyments.

Let it be the pious ambition of our hearts to be of that happy number. Let us hold converse with God in his works, in his ways, in the magnificent scenes of nature, in the government of his adorable providence, and in the sublime dispensation of his grace, which holds forth life and immortality to man. Let us arise habitually as we proceed in our Christian course from the effect to the cause, from the gift to the giver, from every temporal comfort to its adorable source, from every trial and pain to him, that sends it with unerring wisdom and from the sublime promises of the Gospel, to the *faithful* and the *true*, who will accomplish them to the everlasting felicity of his servants. Enlightened still more

and more with extensive views of the Divine perfections from day to day, and improving in the knowledge of that Glorious Being, whose study brings such wisdom, and whose contemplation affords such substantial delight, let this salutary knowledge pass from the understanding to the heart. Let us love the Lord our God with joy, tempered by profound veneration, with a holy ambition to obtain his favour, and to acquire through his grace, in the contemplation of his nature, some happy, though distant resemblance of his moral perfections. Let us love him here with gratitude, trust, resignation, and hope, that we may love and enjoy him hereafter without interruption, when *that which is perfect shall come, and that which is in part shall be done away.*

DISCOURSE XV.

The same Subject continued.

MATTHEW, xxii. 37.

JESUS SAID UNTO HIM, THOU SHALT LOVE THE LORD, THY GOD, WITH ALL THY HEART, AND WITH ALL THY SOUL, AND WITH ALL THY MIND.

AFTER having considered, in our former Discourse, the love of God in its foundation, its nature, and its essential properties, we come now to point out, in our III^d general head, the *measure* and degree in which this pious affection ought to be possessed by the true Christian, in conformity with the injunc-

tion of our Blessed Saviour. *Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.*

It is here, that, under the pretext of aspiring after the perfection of divine love, much fanatical exaggeration has been employed by the irregular fancies of men, and that this most rational and noble affection has been disfigured by the unseemly effusions of mystical enthusiasm. The sect of the *quietists*, in the early ages of the church, and their successors, even in modern and more enlightened times, have been chargeable with great abuses on this article. Nay even in the beginning of the present century, persons, distinguished by their piety and genius, gave such an air of purity and refinement to the system of the quietists, as rendered its errors more dangerous and seducing. But their exaggerated self-denial, their *ecstatic raptures*, their soaring flights of pretended love, that *carried the soul out of itself, and plunged it into the abyss of the divine essence*, only shewed that the best things are susceptible of the most egregious abuse.

But, my brethren, if the ardours of enthusiasm have often disfigured the noble affection
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of our text, a contrary extreme has almost extinguished it in the hearts of many. Nothing is more common, even among professed Christians, than a coldness and insensibility on this article, which are a reproach to the reasonable nature of man, whom eminent faculties and offered succours render capable of contemplating, with admiration and delight, the works, the government, and the perfections of his Creator. In too many a sensual life has so degraded the moral taste and diminished the capacity of enjoying pleasure from the love and imitation of what is excellent and good, that neither the contemplation of the Divine nature and perfections, nor the experience of his benignity and tender mercies, nor the grandeur of his transporting promises, make any suitable or salutary impression on their hearts. *The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not.*

It is of high importance to avoid, on this most interesting subject, the extremes now mentioned. We shall therefore at present explain the expressions of our text, which denote the *measure* in which the love of God must possess the heart of the Christian, in order

to answer the intention of our Saviour, and from the words, explained in their true signification, we shall draw some conclusions relative to the practical application of this part of our subject.

The words before us were addressed by Moses to the people of Israel, and they contain the principle and the end of true religion; but it is the gospel of Jesus and the paternal aspect of the Being of Beings in that gracious dispensation, that give the precept of the text a mild, attracting, and victorious influence on the ingenuous heart. In the explication of this passage, some have given a distinct signification, more fanciful than obvious, to each term. According to them, the *heart* denotes the human will, the *soul* stands for the seat and centre of the affections, while by the *mind* we are to understand our intellectual faculties, and by *strength*, (which St. Luke adds in the parallel place,) the energy, of which we are capable by vigorous resolution and effort. But without entering into such minute distinctions, we may take the words, in a general sense, as expressive of the pious efforts of the Christian to nourish and cultivate the purest
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and most elevated sentiments of veneration and love for the greatest and best of Beings.

If, however, any should alledge, that the expressions of our text seem to require, in the love of God, a degree of fervour, of which all good Christians are not capable, and an attachment to the Deity, which excludes or supercedes all other propensities, affections, and desires, we are ready to reply, that neither the nature of the sublime duty under consideration, nor the words before us, justify such an exaggerated interpretation; for,

In the 1st place, you must conclude from what we observed in a preceding Discourse, that the love of God does not require any positive degree of that constitutional fervour, which is allied to sense and passion, and is far from being an unexceptionable proof of the purity of religious feelings. The want of this kind of fervour sometimes dejects, though without reason, good Christians of a melancholy or phlegmatic complexion, while the possession of it elates, though equally without foundation, persons of a more lively and cheerful temper. The degree of pleasure and satisfaction, even in objects of a spiritual and

moral kind, is, no doubt, increased or diminished by the temperature of the body and the influence it has on the frame of the mind; and it is not to be denied that, even in the exercise of religious affections, a constitutional warmth, under the restraint of rational and just notions of God, is an agreeable thing; but, at the same time, we maintain, that it is not essential to the real possession of the sacred affection recommended in our text.

Nor, 2dly, is the precept, which exhorts us to love God, *with all our heart, soul, and mind*, incompatible with the affections and propensities, which objects of inferior dignity and value are adapted to inspire. In the present state of man, his various wants, senses, and faculties, present to him a variety of objects, which have all a subordinate claim to a suitable portion of his attachment. The creatures of God have subordinate degrees of value and excellence. They administer means of satisfaction and comfort to soften our passage through this state of trial. Many of them also, by their order and beauty, attract admiration, and excite lively and elegant sensations of pleasure, and are, thus, so many steps
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by which we ascend to the contemplation and love of the Great Being from whom they derive the beauty and usefulness which they respectively possess. We must begin more or less by loving the works, before we can have a well-founded love for the worker: we must love, as well as *reason*, from the effect to the cause, or, in other words, our love must begin with the creature and end in the Creator.

When Moses exhorted the people of Israel to *love the Lord, their God, with all their heart, with all their soul, and with all their mind*, he enumerated in the verses that follow this injunction, the temporal blessings which the divine benignity was to shed upon them, by giving them *great cities, houses full of good things, vineyards, and olive trees* *, which he mentions as sources of innocent enjoyment. He does not say, like some austere moralists, (in their vague declamations against the love of the world,) “withdraw all your attachments from these transitory creature-comforts, that you may love the Creator *with*

* Deuteronomy, vi.

all your heart. No ; but he says, *When thou hast eaten and art full, beware lest thou forget the Lord.* The words of Moses, which are repeated in our text, amount to this, that every affection and desire towards inferior and transitory objects should be inferior and subordinate to the love of Him, who is the eternal source of all excellence and felicity.

This general view of the *measure*, in which the love of God ought to occupy our hearts, is susceptible of details highly interesting, but which are too full of matter to be treated here in all their extent. We shall only observe that there is *one principle*, which may enable us to judge of the measure, in which the love of God ought to prevail in us, and at the same time assist us in arriving at it. This is the *principle of sincerity*, which (if I may use that expression) is the vital spirit of faith, obedience, and acceptance with God. It is manifest that this principle requires the *reality* of all the Christian virtues, where Christianity is professed ; and if, on the one hand, it does not seem to fix precisely their measure, yet, on the other, it does not leave this measure en-
tirely

tirely undetermined. A few words will explain our meaning; and the subject is both delicate and important.

Sincerity implies, among other things, our being in earnest, both in the profession of truth and in the practice of duty; and surely, if we possess the essential characters of the love of God, as they have been already pointed out, we cannot be indifferent whether we possess them in a high or in a low degree. If we have a *sincere* veneration for and attachment to the Supreme Being; if we are affected by his goodness, rejoice in his government, resign ourselves to his will, and confide in his promises, we cannot be indifferent whether these characters of the love of God be predominant in our hearts or not—whether they control our inferior appetites and passions, or are controlled by them—whether they direct and govern our conduct, or have little influence on the general course and tenour of our actions. The duty, under consideration, is too sublime and excellent to admit of this indifference; and here *indifference* is absolutely incompatible with *sincerity*. It is not, indeed, to be denied, that sincerity may exist where
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there are many infirmities and defects; yet it *diminishes* in proportion as these defects become gross, habitual, and predominant; and it is *extinguished* when our love to God and virtue become weak and feeble sentiments, are subdued by a favourite passion, enervated by sensuality and indolence, or overpowered by frequent relapses into transgression.

Therefore, when our love to God is sincere, it will be possessed in such a degree, at least, as will render him, not only the object of our veneration, gratitude, and confidence, but the principal object of these affections: it will have such an ascendant over the temptations to transgression, as will render our obedience to the best of Beings habitual and persevering, and engage us to consider his service as the highest and the noblest freedom.

Thus you see that the principle of *sincerity* will animate the true Christian to tend towards *perfection* in the love of the Deity; for though we cannot arrive at it here below, we may still be making nearer approaches towards it, and if the demands of perfection are high, we have a vast eternity before us to fulfil them. The angelic orders observe, in a glorious extent,

tent, the precept of our text, and it is by this that we measure and appreciate their perfection and felicity. We can form very exalted, though inadequate notions of their knowledge of the perfections and works of God, and of the high degrees of pleasing wonder, veneration, and love which they excite. We can conceive more or less how a contemplation of the Sovereign MIND, in full displays of his eternal beauty, sanctity, and goodness, must form a union of their wills with his, which will gradually improve in them the immortal lines of a divine nature. Now the same path towards perfection, which dignifies the angels, is set before the Christian. He is lower in the great scale; but his capacity and means are such as give him an access to its highest degrees. He is, by his rational and immortal nature, made but a *little lower than the angels*; but his future sphere and destination are the same with theirs. Thus no limits are set to our improvement and progress in the love of God. The principle of sincerity and the law or capacity of perfection require our growth in this highest and noblest grace of the Christian life; they require that we go on from one degree

degree of it to another, until *we come to the fullness of the stature of a perfect man in Christ Jesus*. Thus the principle of sincerity, animating Christians to turn to profit the capacity of tending towards perfection, will engage them to use their utmost efforts to purify and improve the love of God in their hearts, and to display its happy fruits in their lives. This is all which the law of perfection, or, in other words, the obligation of tending towards it, requires. We cannot love God in exact proportion to the excellence of his nature and the manifestation of his perfections; this is beyond the powers of *finite* beings, however exalted, and much more so of man *who is but of yesterday, and, comparatively speaking, knoweth nothing*. The wisdom, goodness, and power of God are displayed in numberless worlds, while we can only trace them (and that imperfectly) on the small spot which we inhabit during a few fleeting moments. Nay more (and this is an humbling circumstance,) even what we know of the divine perfections, which are affectingly manifested in our present sphere and our farther destination, too rarely excites correspondent,

and still more seldom proportionable returns of veneration and grateful love. To correct this deficiency ought to be the object of our pious ambition and our daily endeavours.

We see then, from what has been already said, the spirit and import of the words of our text. To sum up the whole in a few words—they exhort us to a sincere, affectionate, active, and persevering attachment to the Supreme Being, *sufficient* to make his service and the attainment of his favour our principal business and delight—*sufficient*, through his grace, with time and effort, to destroy the dominion of every corrupt inclination which interferes with our duty to the best of Beings—*sufficient* with time and effort to remove that miserable division of the heart between virtue and vice, between God and Baal, which is the ignoble and unhappy state of too many professed Christians—*sufficient*, in fine, to increase the power of good habits, to purify more and more the moral taste, and to call forth the active faculties of the soul in the service of God.

Having thus considered the love of God, *first*, in its object and its nature, and *secondly*, in its measure and extent, it remains to consider

sider the importance of this principle, as it is expressed in those words of our Blessed Lord, *This is the first and great commandment.* This shall be the subject of another Discourse. From what has been said in the present one, let us,

In the *first place*, be engaged to distinguish carefully between a constitutional and transitory fervour of devotion, and the calm and genuine love of God, and, in the exercise of this noble affection, let us guard against the exaggerations of enthusiasm. All violent emotions of fervour afford strong suspicions that our love is not pure in its nature, nor solid and permanent with respect to its duration. Our love of the Supreme Being cannot be pure, if our conceptions of his nature be not just; and just conceptions even of his goodness and mercy, combined, as they are, with sanctity, wisdom, and an awful majesty, will always blend the effusions of love with profound veneration, and prevent all familiar flights of a rapturous devotion in the presence of Him, before whom *the seraphims* are said to *hide their faces* *. Besides, nothing is

* Isaiah, vi. 2.

more precarious and uncertain than those religious affections, in which a constitutional fervour hath the ascendant. They are variable and inconstant; whereas the true love of God is a settled habit founded on conviction and knowledge. As in human intercourse and connexions no wise man will confound with real friendship the declarations of attachment which are made in a fally of good humour or a flow of animal spirits; so in religion no good judge of things will confound the precarious fervours of enthusiasm with the genuine love of God. A vein of steady and persevering piety, animated by veneration and complacence, gratitude, and hope, is the most perfect homage we can pay to the Deity. This will be more acceptable to him, *with whom there is no variableness nor shadow of turning*, than the passionate fervour and intermitting effusions of an unequal devotion. But more especially,

In the *second place*, Let what has been here said concerning the measure and extent of the love of God awaken the insensibility and warm the hearts of those in whom this divine flame has never been kindled or seems well

nigh extinguished. Let them revolve in their minds, the innumerable reasons they have, and the weighty obligations they are under, to revere and love the best of Beings. Let them hear the voice, or rather the multitude of voices, which call to them from nature, providence, and grace, to *love the Lord with all their soul, with all their heart, and with all their mind*. Let them endeavour to conceive (what no tongue can express) what they owe to him, who by his creating goodness called them into existence, to make them partakers of reason and immortality; who by his providential benignity conducts them through the various stages of this transitory life, and by his redeeming mercy has prepared for them, at its conclusion, such glorious scenes of felicity, as *eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive*. Let them behold the majesty of their Judge, assuming the mild aspect of a *Father*; the *Son*, to whom all the angels of heaven paid homage, taking upon him our nature and dying on the cross, that he might bring peace, hope, salvation, and immortality to miserable offenders; and the eternal Spirit of sanctity and truth,

truth, offering to dwell with men upon earth. Let them, like David, *use* and meditate on these transporting views of DEITY, until the *fire kindles* and their hearts are affected with delightful sentiments of veneration, gratitude, confidence, and hope towards the Author of their temporal and eternal blessings. They, whose hearts are untouched with these things, and unaffected with these interesting views of the Supreme Being, are deprived of the noblest and most delightful feelings of which human nature is capable. Let us nourish these feelings by the frequent contemplation of their great and glorious object. Let us not only be careful to ascertain the sincerity of our love, but aspire after its improvement and perfection, employing all the means of religion and the events of Providence to confirm our communion with the best of Beings, that we may *be rooted and grounded in love, and filled with the fullness of God**.

• Ephes. iii. 19.

DISCOURSE XVI.

The same Subject continued.

MATTHEW, xxii. 37.

JESUS SAID UNTO HIM, THOU SHALT
LOVE THE LORD, THY GOD, WITH ALL
THY HEART, AND WITH ALL THY
SOUL, AND WITH ALL THY MIND.

AFTER having treated, in two preceding Discourses, 1st, of the foundation and essential properties of the love of God; and, 2dly, of the measure and extent of this noble and delightful duty, we proceed to consider, in our 3d and last head, its high moment and importance, from those words of our blessed Lord, *This is the FIRST and GREAT commandment.*

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The two epithets here given to the precept of our text are expressive, and full of meaning. It is the *first* commandment, that is, it is superior to all others in dignity and obligation—and it is the *great* commandment, whose influence and importance are the most extensive. These two general ideas deserve a particular and circumstantial illustration.

I. The love of God is the *first* commandment in point of dignity and obligation. It would seem scarcely necessary to enlarge on this part of our subject; because, from what was said in our first general head, concerning the foundations of our love to the Supreme Being, your own reflections will easily deduce the superior and unrivalled dignity and obligation of this noble duty. For the Being, in whom every thing venerable and lovely is united in the highest perfection,—whose goodness is pure, disinterested, and unchangeable, and is manifested to mankind in the engaging relations of Father and Redeemer, of Benefactor in time and Rewarder in eternity, is not only entitled to our highest love, but the love of such a Being must strike, intuitively,

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tively, the mind as the first, the noblest, and the most sacred of all obligations. But,

II. If this duty is of the very highest dignity and obligation, so also is its salutary influence great and remarkable, and the sublime affection of love to God is, in its very nature, adapted to produce the happiest effects.

1. In the *first place*, the exercise of love to the greatest and best of Beings has a direct tendency to ennoble human nature, by purifying and improving the frame and temper of our minds. The frequent contemplation of the Divine perfections, to which this pious affection naturally leads, must repeatedly present to us the ideas of what is great, good, excellent, and happy, and thus gradually improve the sensibility of our spiritual taste for these objects. It will make the mind assume some feeble lines of their supreme excellence and beauty, and the Christian *beholding as in a mirrour or glass, the glory of the Lord, will, according to the apostle's expression, be transformed into the same image from glory to glory as by the spirit of the Lord**. The affection

* 2 Cor. iii. 18.

of love to God, will give this contemplation a peculiar degree of sanctifying and transforming power, by exciting a desire to imitate his moral perfections, as far as his grace shall enable us, and our imperfection will admit. It is impossible, as we observed in our preceding Discourse, that we can love in another any quality warmly and cordially, without desiring to possess it, and finding the natural principle of imitation arising in our hearts. But it is also remarkable, that no qualities excite love in the human mind, but such as are of a benevolent nature, and, in some degree, imitable by those who love them. We do not love the Supreme Being on account of his omnipotence, his omniscience, his immensity. These sublime perfections, when considered in themselves, excite only admiration and astonishment: but we love him for his goodness, wisdom, and mercy, and these lovely and attracting attributes are in their nature imitable in different degrees by moral beings. Their possession, in a certain measure, constituted, originally, the image of God in the heart of man, before his fall; and their restoration will, one day, renew that

image, through the divine power of transforming love, and make it approach more and more towards perfection, through the everlasting ages.

2. Great also, *in the second place*, is the influence and importance of the love of God in rendering all the divine laws sacred to the heart, and forming, thus, the salutary principle and habit of a universal obedience. It is one of the immediate effects of love to unite *wills*; and though there may be exceptions to this rule among men, there can be none applicable to the love of God, because his will is always righteous and good. Therefore, if we love truly the best of Beings,—if the dispensations of his providential goodness and redeeming mercy have excited suitable sentiments of gratitude, hope, and confidence in him, this must produce, in the nature of the thing, a blessed harmony between our will and his, wherever his designs and intentions are manifested. The true Christian will say, from a habit of harmony with the will of his Creator, *Thy will be done upon earth, as it is in heaven.* and as love excites this cordial desire, that the will of God should be fulfilled, so will it produce

duce a powerful inclination to obey it upon every call of duty. It will assume a commanding power over our actions, and bend them gently to the dominion of the great and good Being, whom we love and revere. Every law, which bears the stamp of his authority, however painful it may be to a corrupt taste, or to an irregular passion, will be revered, and a view to the approbation of him, *whose favour is better than life*, will fortify the soul against the power of temptations from without, and the influence of irregular passions from within. Thus love will enable the Christian *to cut off a right hand, and to pluck out a right eye*; it will give vigour to his active powers, and make him capable of the noblest efforts in the service of his God. His impressions of the excellence and benignity of the great Being, his grateful views of benefits received, and his transporting hopes of blessings to come, will diminish whatsoever is difficult and painful to a corrupt nature in a course of obedience. These views and these impressions will prevent any exception in favour of a predominant passion. They will make the religious mind feel the beautiful

ful and inseparable connexion that there is between *loving God* and *keeping his commandments*.

3. And as the love of God leads directly to an obedience universal in its *extent*, the excellence of this pious affection is farther displayed by its influence on the *nature* of this obedience. For it renders obedience voluntary and cheerful, the pleasing service of a happy child and a respectful servant, and not the forced sacrifice of an unwilling and terrified slave. *O how I love thy law ! it is my meditation all the day. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart.* Nor is it surprising that the love of God, where it truly animates the good man, should render his obedience pure in its principle, and cheerful in its progress and perseverance. For since this noble affection purifies the moral and spiritual taste by a frequent contemplation of the divine perfections, by this very circumstance it becomes *a joy to the just to do that which is right*:—since it excites a desire to please the great and venerable Being, whom we love, it must produce a complacency and satisfaction in every act of virtue and every

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instance

instance of duty, when we consider them as the means of obtaining his approbation and favour. And, finally, as the love of God improves and invigorates the love of mankind, so does it, by a direct consequence, render the duties of justice, equity, compassion, and benevolence, towards our brethren and fellow-members of God's great family, more pure in their principle, and more delightful in their exercise.

Thus the love of God assimilates, in some measure, the obedience of the Christian to that of the angels, who are represented in scripture as rejoicing to perform the commands of their king, and *to do his pleasure*. It not only unites all the virtues under its comprehensive influence, but also adds new pleasure to their pursuit, from the consideration of the great and good Being, under whose eye they are practised; and thus, also, it gives stability and perseverance to obedience; for love *never faileth*; uniting the noblest and the most ingenuous pleasure with obedience, it overpowers every motive to rebellion or apostasy. While obedience is founded on terror alone, it is precarious and
uncertain,

uncertain, for servile terror is a state of anguish, which can only produce an involuntary submission. As a beginning, it may be a useful restraint to those whom nobler motives cannot touch; but as long as fear is not softened by love, nor modified by those generous feelings of veneration and awful regard which are due to the greatest and best of Beings, it oppresses the heart, destroys all inward peace and self-enjoyment, and is a burden which the mind is unable to bear for any length of time. It therefore frequently happens among men, that, when the terrors of an alarmed conscience are not mitigated by humble and candid contrition, they throw the mind back into desperate presumption and profligacy. In order, therefore, to render our obedience stable, pleasure must be its companion, and love its principle: so unspeakable is the importance, and so benignant the influence of the love of God.

4. We may observe farther, that as this noble affection is of the highest importance by nourishing the love of mankind, and all other Christian virtues, so is it in itself and its immediate exercise, an inexhaustible source of
pleasure

pleasure and self-enjoyment. It is the most pleasing of all the affections, as the opposite feelings of malignity and hatred are the most painful. It sweetens the frame and temper of the mind, and, when excited by an object so venerable and benevolent as the Being who possesses all perfections, it diffuses a happy serenity in the mind, and that anticipating hope *which entereth within the veil*, that covers our succeeding station in the kingdom of God. The pleasure, indeed, which immediately results from the exercise of love to God, is a matter of feeling, rather than of description, and no words will convey an adequate notion of it to the understanding of those, whose hearts have not felt its influence. The good man enjoys it in his own contented mind, and, in the very nature of this pleasure, he has conscious proofs that it has sure foundations, and shall endure for ever. In the judgment of the unthinking mockers at religion, he may pass for an enthusiast; but if they could conceive the calm and exalted pleasure which the love of God sheds through his heart,—how it raises him above the impotence of their sophisms and the wretchedness of their raillery,

raillery,—how it often turns his indignation into compassion at a view of the felicity they abandon, and the means of true and immortal enjoyment, which they trample under foot, this would at least reduce them to silence.

5. As this divine principle is immediately delightful in its exercise, so is it a rich source of consolation in all the painful events and sorrows of life. All these are, to the good man, the dispensations of sovereign wisdom, executing, in a manner, sometimes, beyond his comprehension, the designs of Supreme goodness, and this consideration will inspire a placid submission to the ways of Him, who does *not* afflict willingly. Thus love sends many rays of light and consolation through the gloom of adversity, and its gentle, but powerful influence extends where the world and its resources are but *miserable comforters*. And if it opens a source of comfort in the dejecting events of time; it is also a powerful preservative against the anxious fears of eternity. It does not, indeed, remove a filial fear of offending our Heavenly Father:—on the contrary, it produces and nourishes this ingenuous fear, which is its constant attendant

ant in the Christian's heart. Nor does it remove a certain solicitude about our eternal interests; for this is naturally suggested by an humble sense of our infirmities, and the vast importance of a happy conclusion to our state of trial. There is also still a solemn awe which strikes the mind, when it contemplates in God the righteous Judge and Governor of the world; and this awe is proper to temper love and prevent its degenerating into a sanguine and familiar confidence, or a presumptuous security. But in proportion as our love to God increases and brings forth its proper fruits, it will proportionably remove from our solicitude and awe every thing which is adapted to disturb our tranquillity. It will preserve us from the servile fear of death, and prepare us to pass through its *dark valley* without dismay.

Such then is the inexpressible importance of the love of God, both with respect to our present comfort and our future hopes. But this affection, like all the other Christian virtues, is possessed in very different degrees; and it is only in proportion as we cultivate and improve it, by a diligent use of the means of
grace,

grace, that it will give us peace, joy, and assurance for ever. The Christian who possesses it, even in a low degree, ought not to be discouraged, if *he loves the Lord his God* in sincerity, and is earnestly diligent, in the use of means, in order to bring this ingenuous and pious affection to still greater degrees of stability and elevation. But how many bear the Christian name, the name of that God *who dwelleth in love*, and yet seem to be strangers to the power and efficacy, and consequently to the fruits and comforts, of this noble affection? From the whole tenour of our Discourses on this subject, you will easily perceive that we are very far from recommending an *enthusiastic spirit* or those *ecstatic raptures*, which have no foundation but in passion and fancy. There are, indeed, persons who give these opprobrious names even to true piety; but their abuses be to themselves: we have here been recommending that love of the Supreme Being, which is consistent with the purest reason and the most perfect soundness of mind—which is founded on the most solid principles and the most interesting relations—which is necessary to our
comfort

comfort and tranquillity in this mixed and transitory state, and to our hope, in the approach of a future and awful scene; which will bring forth fruits of virtue here, and crown them with high degrees of improvement and felicity hereafter. If the perfections of God are the sublime source of every thing that is great, excellent, and lovely—if his relations to us, as our Creator, benefactor, and, in Christ Jesus, our merciful Redeemer, are as real as the most intimate relations in human life can be—then surely not to love such a Being must shew a very great and unnatural depravity of mind.

Let us, then, avoid every thing that has a tendency to oppose the rise and progress of this amiable and elevated affection in our hearts: let us ever retain a proper sense of its high importance, as the great and fruitful principle of all religion and virtue, which gives to all the Christian graces their stability and perfection; and let this consideration engage us to employ all the means of grace, with which we are furnished, to nourish within us the delightful sentiments of veneration and gratitude, hope and confidence, which it com-
v prehends.

prehends. More especially let us avoid, as much as possible, connexions with the licentious and profane, keep within the proper bounds our sensual appetites, and our natural attachment to the pleasures and enjoyments of a present transitory world. All these have a tendency to corrupt that religious and moral taste, whose purity is so essential to the growth of the love of God in the soul, and which renders it an acceptable oblation to its adorable object. On the other hand, let private meditation and public worship, the ordinances of religion, and the events of Providence, be all employed to nourish and confirm our communion with the best of Beings. And above all things,

Lastly, Let us examine and estimate the sincerity and extent of our love to God, by its salutary fruits in our lives and conversations; more particularly, by its influence in the government of our irregular passions; by the succour it affords us in the hour of temptation, and the support it communicates in the time of trial; by the resignation with which it calms the mind, in the dark seasons of affliction; and the humble fortitude it inspires,

in the prospect or approach of death and judgment. It is by these decisive marks that we shall be enabled to judge truly of the reality of our love to the best of Beings.

You may see, from all that has been hitherto said concerning the nature and influence of the love of God, that *religious principle* is the only true and effectual support of *moral virtue*. An attentive and serious consideration of what passes daily before our eyes, in human life, will convince us of this important truth. The decline of religious principle, of genuine and fervent piety, is the object of a general complaint; and the proportionable decline of morals and wisdom, in the conduct of life, is equally notorious. In effect, it is the love of God alone that can effectually engage us to make conscience of every moral duty.

It has been maintained by some, who inconsiderately erect systems of *virtue*, independent on *religion*, that moral virtue, viewed in itself, is a lovely form, which beautifies the human character, and is, by the internal joy it produces, its own immediate reward. But why separate virtue from God, who is its eternal and only source? This is equivalent

to the separation of light from the sun—of the effect from its cause. The moral perfections of the Deity, his goodness, mercy, righteousness, and truth, are the great models of every thing that is virtuous and worthy in a human character; and therefore the contemplation of him, as the benevolent and holy Governor of the world, gives a peculiar authority and force to that inward sense of moral obligation which was originally implanted in the mind of man. Besides, the beauty and excellence of moral virtue can never have such a commanding influence upon conduct, as when we consider it as the image of the great and good Creator of the world—the object of his approbation—the law and statute of his spiritual and eternal kingdom, which bears the sublime characters of his benevolent, but also venerable and awful authority. This will give a new accession of influence to the *things* that are *true, just, lovely,* and *of good report*, and animate us to run *the way of his commandments* with *enlarged* and *willing hearts*. A submission to God's authority, a sense of his paternal and redeeming love, and a grateful return of love to him; these

these are the principles and affections which, seconded by his divine succours, will powerfully and effectually influence us in every branch and instance of duty.

To conclude :—Let us feel how happy a thing it is to live under the empire of a Being, who, though unbounded in power, founds his supreme authority in goodness and wisdom, and demands obedience from the ingenuous principles of veneration and love. These sweeten submission, and render the obedience of the true Christian the cheerful oblation of a willing heart. If he feels that religious awe which is excited by the aspect of the Supreme and Righteous Judge, yet the permanent affection of his heart is the love of the reconciled and propitious Benefactor. *The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice*, is the constant language of his heart; and the sublime declaration of the Apostle, that *God is love*, is the predominant motive to his obedience. Thus, in the goodness of the Divine nature, and the mercies of his covenant, the Christian's hope becomes triumphant, and he sees the terrors of God's tribunal diminish, in proportion as his love of the best of Beings grows more ardent

and habitual. But even goodness and mercy will always be, in a certain sense, awful to his respectful love : he will fear the goodness of his Heavenly Father, and love the authority of his Righteous Judge ; and there is no moment in which he will guard his heart with more circumspection against the seduction of sin, than in that in which he enjoys the most unclouded prospect of the mercy of his God.

DISCOURSE XVII.

PSALM viii. 3, 4.

WHEN I CONSIDER THY HEAVENS, THE
 WORK OF THY FINGERS; THE MOON
 AND THE STARS, WHICH THOU HAST
 ORDAINED; WHAT IS MAN, THAT THOU
 ART MINDFUL OF HIM, OR THE SON OF
 MAN, THAT THOU VISITEST HIM?

THE frame of mind in which these words
 were pronounced by the royal Psalmist,
 the objects that occasioned them, and the feel-
 ings and sentiments they imply, are worthy
 of peculiar attention. He had been contem-
 plating the sublime spectacle of nature, which
 is so often beheld, without either reflexion,
 admiration, or delight, by a multitude of un-
 Y 4 thinking

thinking mortals. The starry heavens, and the moon, shedding her mild beams from an unclouded sky, had probably carried up his thoughts, during the solemn silence of the night, to the Being whom Nature proclaims as her author, and but imperfectly represents in unnumbered worlds. Transported with astonishment and delight by the contemplation of this magnificent scene, so diversified and so affecting by its beauty and grandeur, and sending forward his imagination into the immensity of the works of God, he casts back a deep reflexion upon himself. In this review, two different aspects of human nature present themselves to his mind. On the one hand, his pride vanishes: and, to astonished imagination, his body appears as an atom in infinite space, and his existence as a moment in eternal duration: on the other, he sees human nature invested with a high rank and important privileges; and under the impression made by this affecting contrast, he calls out, with sensibility and surprise, *What is man, that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man, that thou visitest him?*

In

In discoursing from these words we shall, in the first place, endeavour to prevent or remove the erroneous ideas which, when superficially viewed, they may be adapted to excite.

2dly, We shall consider the sentiments which may be supposed to have passed in the mind of the Psalmist, when he uttered them, in such a pathetic manner, in the solemn hour of pious contemplation.

I. It is not to be supposed that the words of our text were spoken to the disadvantage of human nature in general. This could not have been the design of the Psalmist, since, in the verse following, man is represented, as made but *a little lower than the angels*, and as *crowned with glory, honour, and dominion*. These words, it is true, have been, by some applied, in a prophetic sense, to the Son of God ; but this is, rather, an overstrained interpretation of them, and they are certainly applicable, in a literal sense, to human nature in general. For if man, by his material frame, is connected with the animal world, he also stands connected, in the great scale, with angelic natures, by his intellectual and moral powers.

powers. When we consider him as made capable of contemplating the works and perfections of his Creator, formed with the extinguishable sense of good and evil, and endowed with the sublime gift of immortality, we cannot but observe in his original constitution evident characters of elevation and dignity. And if we consider, moreover, his rank and destination, as they are pointed out in the gospel, we see there human nature, fallen and corrupt as it is, enriched with high privileges and promises. For there we see the Son of God descending from heaven, and dying upon the cross, that he might save man, and raise human nature renewed and sanctified to eternal life and happiness. It was not therefore to cast a reproach on that nature that the Psalmist said, *What is man, that thou art mindful of him?*

It would seem, at first sight, that the Psalmist, in this ejaculation, places human nature, in a comparative view, with the heavens and their shining hosts, which were at this moment the objects of his contemplation and wonder. And there is, indeed, something amazingly grand in the aspect of the starry firmament :
but,

but, as the celestial bodies appear to us, they exhibit only displays of material beauty and grandeur, and, in this point of view, are inferior in rank to a class of beings, whose essential nature is spiritual, intelligent, moral, and immortal. The moral creation, in all its ranks and orders, is, without doubt, the noblest work of God. In Nature's fairest forms, in her most graceful and majestic aspects, there is no beauty equal to that of a good moral character—no species of harmony and order to be compared with that which reigns in the sentiments, affections, and habits of a virtuous mind. The light of truth is more pleasing than the lustre of the stars; and the benignant influence of the sun, which enlivens universal nature, is much inferior, in its kind, to the sweet influence of those benevolent affections, which draw upon the beneficent the *blessing of him that was ready to perish, and cause the widow's heart to sing for joy.* The question, therefore, of the Psalmist was not intended to diminish or undervalue the excellence of man, by comparing him with those celestial bodies, which shine in the firmament and *declare the glory of their Creator.*

And

And should it be supposed (as doubtless is the case) that many of these shining worlds above us are inhabited by various orders of beings, in comparison with whom man holds a low rank in the universe,—what follows? It does not follow, that the human species, however inferior to these exalted beings, are therefore below the paternal regard of their Creator. Unphilosophical and even childish was the notion of Epicurus, that it was below the dignity and incompatible with the pleasures of the Gods to give any attention to human affairs; and this senseless language has been more or less adopted by too many pretended sages in more enlightened times. In effect, when God says, by the mouth of his prophet, *the heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool,—yet to him will I look, even to the man who is of an humble and contrite heart*; many look upon this doctrine with a stupid kind of astonishment, which imperceptibly degenerates into doubt and unbelief. But it is easy to perceive the source of their delusion. They take their ideas of the Divinity from the characters of indolent or fastidious greatness among men; and it is
not

not surprising to find them drawing disgusting consequences from such an absurd comparison. If it was no diminution of the greatness of the Creator to form various ranks and orders of being, it cannot be such to extend his condescending benignity and care to them all. On the contrary, it is in this that the greatness of the Deity is truly manifested, that his providential care extends to all, and that his goodness opens its paternal hand to every thing that lives. Besides, what idea remains of greatness, if goodness and benignity be removed from it? none but that of senseless ostentation or terrifying power: and surely these are not the characters of a perfect being. Nay, even in our ideas of human grandeur—where they are just and accurate, condescending goodness is so far from being a defect, that it gives power the true character of greatness. The monarch who, without neglecting the more weighty and important objects of government, extended his beneficent regards to the cottage of the poor, instead of diminishing his glory, would add a new lustre to his diadem, and complete the character of genuine majesty. The lustre of the sun is not
dispo-

dishonoured by its shining upon the insect as well as upon the monarch; it is this which enhances its glory, and renders it a precious image of the benignity of its maker. And should the timorous creature fear its being overlooked in the immensity of the works of God—this idea would be as dishonourable to the omnipresence of God, as the former supposition is to his goodness. If it is in the nature of perfect goodness to be universal in its operations; it is in the nature of the Omnipresent Being that nothing can escape his inspection—and it is in the nature of the Omniscient and Omnipotent Being, that no variety of objects can embarrass his attention. The activity of limited and imperfect beings is fatigued and perplexed by an application to many things at the same time, therefore they are obliged to neglect smaller objects, and to confine their attention to those which are most important: But this is not the case of the Being, who comprehends, pervades, sustains and governs *all* beings and all things by one eternal act of his omnipotent will. *Great* and *little* are measures, relative to the conceptions and powers of imperfect creatures; they

they have no relation to the energy and operations of him to whom immensity and omnipotence belong. *Behold, (saith the Prophet *,) the nations are as a drop in the bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance. All nations are before him as nothing, and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity.*

But if, by the question of the Psalmist, it was not meant to lessen man by comparing him with other parts of the visible creation, nor to intimate an apprehension of his being neglected by providential goodness, or overlooked in the immensity of the divine works ; what were the sentiments which may be supposed to have passed in his mind, when he uttered, in such a pathetic manner, the words before us—*What is man, that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou visitest him?* This we come now to consider in the II^d head of this Discourse.

To enter truly into the spirit of these words, we may consider the Psalmist, after an attentive contemplation of the beauty and

* Isaiah, xl. 12.

grandeur of the firmament, casting a pensive thought on the weak side of human nature, and then rising to a view of its exalted privileges, as placed at the head of the visible creation, in this part of the works of God. This mixed aspect, these contrasting views of human nature produce effusions of humility and admiration, which seem to be the feelings expressed in that pathetic exclamation of our text—*What is man, that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man, that thou visitest him?*

1st, The Psalmist takes a view of the weak side of humanity, and expresses his sense of it in that mortifying question, *What is man?* For notwithstanding the dignity of human nature in its primitive state, and the capacity which it still retains of rising through gospel grace to felicity and perfection, yet, considered in his actual state, as a fallen and corrupt creature, man exhibits humbling instances of weakness, indigence, imperfection, and misery. His *bodily frame* is subject to dissolution and decay from a thousand accidents, and carries in it the principles of its destruction: *He cometh up as a flower, and is cut down—he fleeth*
as

as a shadow and continueth not—his days are as a hand-breadth—they pass as a tale that is told. During this transitory passage to an unknown region, his strength is little more than weakness—his pursuits are mingled with sorrow and disappointment, and his *best estate* is *altogether* vanity. He is compassed about with infirmities—he is beset with pain and sickness—he is perplexed with doubts and difficulties—he is hurried, different ways, by his passions—he wanders in errors and mistakes—and his few days are full of labour and trouble. As to his *moral conduct*—what is he? he is a sinful and degenerate creature: We see his mind often estranged from the knowledge, and his heart from the love of his Creator; his actions are often irregular, his affections misplaced, his faculties disordered, his talents perverted or neglected. How often doth he behold the heavens extended over his head, the stars in their courses, declaring the glory of their Maker and nature, pouring in upon him displays of the presence, power, and goodness of God, and yet how often does he behold these wonders with inattention or stupidity? he sees the works without adoring the

Worker, and is little solicitous to obtain the favour of that glorious Being, whose favour and protection are so essential to his great, permanent, and eternal interests. With respect to the use of the means of improvement and sanctification, what is man? how often do we see him perverse and stubborn in an unhappy degree? disobedient to the calls of reason, struggling against the checks of conscience, deaf to the admonitions of Providence, the invitations of mercy, and the calls of God's word—not to be influenced by promises or threatenings, by a sense of duty or interest, by present enjoyments and sufferings, or by the prospect of greater to come; unmindful of his greatest Benefactor, and forgetful of all his benefits! What is man then, in this view of human nature? It is surely an humbling view to every one of us, as far as we are respectively concerned in it. It is an humbling view to the best, when they reflect with candour on their infirmities and failings; but it is full of terror to the impenitent, who persevere in their abuses and desperately trample upon the means of grace and reformation. What is man then in these views of human nature?

And

And this is the being of whom a bountiful Providence is *mindful* from day to day—from moment to moment—and whom he constantly visits by the marks of his bounty—the means of his grace, and the offers of his directing wisdom. This is the being whom he has made but *a little lower than the angels—crowned with glory and honor—and made to have dominion over the works of his hands—*and who, by his vices and passions, excites in that globe in which he has dominion, scenes of disorder, desolation, and misery. This is that being for whose use the earth produces its fruits—for whose comfort and preservation the moon is *appointed for seasons* and *the sun knoweth his going down*. This is the being whom an intelligent nature, noble faculties, and an immortal duration, raise to a connexion with angelic natures—whom the Son of God came down from heaven to sanctify and save, and to whom is held forth, in the promises of God, the offer of an *inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away*.

When we consider the state of human nature under this complicated view of the corruption,

ruption, infirmities, talents, privileges, and prospects of man, shall we not adopt the language of the Psalmist, and say, *What is man, that thou art mindful of him?* Let us say this with profound *humility*; but let us say it also with pious *admiration*.

I. There is no point of view so adapted to excite *humility* as that which is presented to us in the words of our text. The contemplation of the starry heavens—of those unnumbered worlds that roll over our heads—the view of the small spot we occupy in the immensity of the Divine works, while innumerable orders of angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim, fill more exalted stations in the vast universe; all this is proper to give us humbling notions of ourselves. And if a consideration of our reasonable nature, as susceptible of high degrees of felicity and perfection, and of the inestimable privileges with which we are enriched by our gospel vocation, be adapted to excite a certain sense of dignity, and a certain elevation of mind, yet an impartial consideration of the manner in which we have improved this nature, and these privileges, will turn our glory into shame. Great advantages,

vantages, tarnished by multiplied failings and abuses, must suppress every motion of pride, and engage the being, whom God hath made *but a little lower than the angels*, to call out, in the candid language of the contrite Publican, *Lord, be merciful to me a sinner.*

But, secondly, this humility will be raised into *admiration*, when we represent to ourselves the Being, whose greatness and majesty the heavens themselves but feebly represent, as *mindful* of us, and visiting us constantly by the paternal displays of his providence and grace. This condescension and goodness carry marks of excellence and grandeur, which must excite the highest *admiration*, and make the Supreme Majesty of Heaven appear in the most venerable and delightful aspect to man. *Will God in very deed dwell with man upon earth?* However natural it may be to God, it cannot but be a most amazing and rejoicing thought to us to consider the Being, who fills immensity, as *mindful of man*; and not only extending to him his providential care, but graciously offering to deliver him from his corruption, to comfort him in his infirmities, and to direct his course through human life, so as

to make all events turn, in the issue, to his improvement and felicity. All these ideas enter into that question of the Psalmist, *What is man, that thou art thus mindful of him?* And this view of the Supreme Being, by connecting the world with its Author, and man with his God, is truly delightful indeed, and wonderful. It is this view of the Almighty that gives dignity and consistence to the state of man; which would be, otherwise, little better than a visionary scene of unsubstantial enjoyment and real pain: and upon this view, as on a solid basis, is founded that spirit of piety, or religious principle, which is of the highest consequence to the comfort and happiness of human life. It is certain that the world itself, and all the objects that contribute to our comfort and enjoyment in our passage through it, must be seen, by the *religious man*, in a very different light from that in which they appear to those who *live without God in the world*; that is, without a proper attention to the perfections, government, and providential care of the great Being, who is *mindful of man*, and on whom the *eyes of all things wait*. In effect, how many sources of enjoyment are
lost

lost to the latter, in the contemplation of the world in which they live, in the consideration of their relations and connexions in human life, and in the prospect of their future lot and destination!

I. With respect to the visible or material world, what an elevated pleasure, similar to that of the Psalmist in our text, must arise in the religious mind, when it contemplates the wisdom, power, and goodness which are displayed in the earth, and in the vault of heaven, with such beauty and magnificence! But it is the religious mind alone which enjoys *this* pleasure truly and fully; because it arises from the grand effects to the wonderful cause, and sees in that cause the gracious and benevolent Being who is *mindful of man*. The mechanical sophistry of the atheist, and even the gloomy doubtings of the sceptic, tarnish the beauty of nature, and leave the mind dark, anxious, and uncomfortable, amidst all its charms: nor does the merely nominal professor of religion, who meditates little upon the Divine perfections and government, see the world in a much better light. He scarcely derives any higher enjoyment from it, than as it con-

tributes to the support of animal life, and the gratification of his external senses. This is not the case of the religious man: he considers the heavens as *declaring the glory of the Lord*, and the earth as full of *the riches* of its Maker: he observes the benign influence of the Almighty, warming in the sun, refreshing in the air, glowing in the stars, and diffusing life, intelligence, and well-being, in various degrees, through his universal empire. These views excite veneration and a pleasing kind of astonishment; they nourish gratitude, hope, and confidence, and thus produce the most joyful emotions of which the human heart is susceptible.

Secondly, Consider the different views which the religious man, and the man who *lives without God in the world*, must have, respectively, of their existence and condition in this present state. The former, seeing God in all things, looks up to him, in nature, as a providential protector, and in redemption and grace, as a father and a friend. He views his present state as a scene of infancy and trial; and even its evils and pains as the dispensations of paternal wisdom and goodness, for the
exercise

exercise of virtue, and the correction of moral disorder. In this friendly aspect of nature and grace he humbly acquiesces, and even *goes on his way* rejoicing in expectation and hope. But to the man who is destitute of religious principles, these comforting views are unknown. He is, as it were, in a fatherless world, with no security for the continuance of his enjoyments, and no resource, when they are succeeded, in the instability of external things, by disappointment and sorrow. Little accustomed to exercise and nourish his faith in that supreme goodness, wisdom and power, which are the stable foundations of hope and confidence, he ascribes the evils he suffers to accidental causes, which, instead of alleviating, exasperate their pains; and he is deprived of the consolation and support which arise from a persuasion, that the great Being, who fills immensity, is *mindful of man*.

Consider, thirdly, how peculiarly interesting society, friendship, and domestic relations are rendered by religious views—by the consideration, that God is *mindful of man*. When the good man considers his friends and relatives, as the offspring of one Supreme Parent,

rent, as fellow-members with him of the great family of God, this point of view renders, surely, the ties of nature still more tender; the bonds of friendship more interesting and delicious; the feelings of humanity still more liberal and extensive. In this point of view, the good man considers his connexions with the righteous as immortal. There is no worthy and eminent character, with whom he has conversed, or whose virtues have been recorded in history, whom he may not hope to meet, one day, in that paternal and celestial *house, where there are many mansions*. In this view of the great family of God, as having only its commencement here below, and considering himself as a member of this family, his mind, while he runs his race upon earth, is elevated with the prospect of a nobler society, and the hopes of arising to a sublimer sphere of action and felicity, in the kingdom of his Father. No such prospects embellish or ennoble the connexions of the irreligious man with his fellow-creatures in a present world. He considers the human race as a set of beings, who came into existence he knows not *how*, and who, successively disappearing,
pass

pass he knows not *where*, nor for what *purpose*. In this view of the human race, unconnected with an Almighty and Benevolent Creator, the amiable ties between parents, children, brothers, friends, and all the other endearing relations of human society, are transient and precarious connexions—connexions of a short and uncertain duration here, with no prospect of a renewal hereafter, in more improved forms and happier situations. This, where all reflexion and forecast are not banished, sheds an uncomfortable gloom on the present scene of human life, and covers, with thick and painful darkness, the departing moment.

What language, then, can express the frenzy of those, who voluntarily deprive themselves of the comfort and delight which arise from a persuasion that the Great Being, who formed the universe, is *mindful of man*, and will direct the course and secure the true interests of his faithful servants, in all the periods of their eternal duration? While they banish him from their thoughts—while they close their eyes on the empire of his providence, the authority of his laws, the manifestations
of

of his mercy, and the offer of his grace, they forfeit the most rational and solid comforts of a present life, and the sublime hopes of life eternal.

Let us therefore guard against every thing that can have a tendency to exclude us from the protection of this glorious Being, and secure his favour by faith in his promises, and sincere efforts to obey his holy and righteous laws. Let us consider how vain all projects of happiness must be, which we form without an humble dependance on him, who is the only source of all true felicity. He, who can embitter the joys of prosperity, and soften the anguish of adversity and sorrow—He, who can make all the events of time contribute to the happiness of his faithful servants, in endless scenes of existence—He surely ought to be the supreme object of our pious regard, in all the duties, events, trials, and relations of human life. No state or condition, however painful, can render us unhappy, while we enjoy his favour, his direction, and guidance; and the most splendid scenes of external prosperity will be ineffectual for our comfort, when these are withdrawn, and his gracious presence is re-

moved from us for ever. His presence, indeed, is every where: but how different are its aspects to the righteous, who respect his laws, and the perverse and disobedient, who insult his government! To the former, it is a source of light and power, to direct and maintain them in their way: to the latter, it is an object of disquietude and apprehension, if ever it comes across their thoughts. It will carry the righteous persevering and triumphant through the changes of life, and through the *valley of the shadow of death*; it will raise them from their rank *below the angels*, to the society and happiness of these glorious beings, and to eternal communion with Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; to whom, &c.

DISCOURSE XVIII.

On the Gospel-Representation of Life Eternal.

[Preached on Easter-Sunday.]

JOHN, vi. 68.

THEN SIMON PETER ANSWERED HIM:
LORD, TO WHOM SHALL WE GO? THOU
HAST THE WORDS OF ETERNAL LIFE.

ONE of the most acute sceptics, or infidels, of the present age*, sitting down seriously, as he tells us himself, to consider the amount of his philosophical speculations on the origin, faculties, and destination of man, expresses the result of his researches in the

* Hume.

following

following words: "I am affrighted and confounded with that forlorn solitude in which I am placed in *my* philosophy. When I look abroad, I foresee, on every side, dispute, contradiction, and distraction: when I turn my eye inward, I find nothing but doubt and ignorance. Where am I, or what? From what causes do I derive my existence, and to *what condition shall I return?* I am confounded with these questions, and begin to fancy myself in the most deplorable condition imaginable, environed with the deepest darkness*."

There is a remarkable contrast between this *piteous* and dismal complaint, and the affecting question, so full of a meek and pleasing confidence, which St. Peter addresses to him, who was the true *light of the world*, in the words of our text. There is, indeed, something peculiarly affecting in this question, *Lord, to whom shall we go?* It discovers a pious and, moreover, a natural anxiety, about the great and essential interests of man—a deep concern about his condition after the present transitory

* See his *Treatise on Human Nature*, vol. i. pp. 4; 8, 9. and particularly 466, 7.

state,

state, in which his continuance is so short and precarious. It implies, in a more particular manner, a painful conviction of the darkness and uncertainty that hung, like a cloud, both over the heathen world and the Jewish church, with respect to the great interests of futurity. *Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.* Such was the answer of St. Peter, when, on occasion of a defection of several of the disciples, and of the multitude that followed him, *Jesus said to the twelve, Will ye also go away?—To whom shall we go? Shall we go to the heathen philosopher, whose conjectures are so often mixed with uncertainty, or degraded by absurd and visionary fictions; or to the Jewish doctor, whose worldly views are fixed only on a temporal Canaan, or a terrestrial paradise? No, Lord, we come unto thee; for thou alone hast truly the words of eternal life.*

We are not to conclude, indiscriminately, from this declaration, that Christ was the first teacher who presented any views of a future state to mankind. However great the doubts, errors, and perplexities may have been that embarrassed the sages of antiquity in their researches

searches concerning the nature and duration of the soul, it cannot be denied that many of them considered its immortality as highly probable; but their doctrine on this head was much rather founded on specious conjecture than clear evidence. It is even remarkable, that the philosophical arguments in favour of a future state were never so ingenious and solid as they have been since the *Sun of righteousness* arose upon the world, and brought *life and immortality to light* by his gospel: for when we know that a thing *is*, we are always more accute in finding out reasons *why* it *should be*. It cannot be denied, that the capacity of perpetual improvement, which is visible in man; the marks of a state of trial, which the present scene of his existence bears; the natural desire of immortality, which burns in the human breast, and increases in proportion as we advance in a virtuous course; form presumptions in favour of a future state. But what do these prove, when they are not combined with a *knowledge* of the *perfections* and counsels of the Deity, and some clear and consistent idea of his *moral government*? And of this knowledge, what imperfect traces,

mixed with the most extravagant fancies and errors, do we find in the best productions of Pagan wisdom? The unbounded prospect of infinite space and eternal duration lay before the sages of antiquity, but clouds and darknesses rested upon it; and the Great Being, to whom immensity and eternity exclusively belong, was to them (with respect to any thing beyond the present scene of his providential government) the *unknown God*.

It is nevertheless certain, that the doctrine of a future state was a prevailing opinion in many nations, before the coming of Christ; and though law-givers and princes have been charged with propagating this doctrine, often from policy rather than persuasion, yet this is not a proof that the doctrine had no other foundation than political fiction. In the earlier ages of the pagan world the belief of it prevailed most; but in process of time it declined so much among the Greeks and Romans, that at the period of Christ's appearance upon earth it was almost generally extinguished, both among the philosophers and the vulgar. A few exceptions are not sufficient to invalidate this fact.

As to the Jews, notwithstanding their peculiar advantages, their history gives us but faint and dubious notices of their views into futurity. The doctrine of future rewards and punishments made no part of their religious system, which exhibited only promises and threatenings of a temporal and national kind. Their worldly sanctuary was only, at best, the typical prefiguration of a more perfect dispensation, and of *better things* to come. One of their three most eminent sects denied, altogether, a future state; while the *Essenes*, who acknowledged the immortality of the soul, corrupted this belief with the most extravagant mixtures of Pagan superstition and enthusiasm; and the Pharisees, who believed a future resurrection, degraded this doctrine with a multitude of corrupt and sensual fictions. Well, then, might St. Peter, or any candid Pagan or Jew, who had occasion to hear the instructions of his Divine Master, say unto Jesus, *Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.*

It is our purpose, at present, to shew, from these words, in what sense it may be said, and the reasons which authorize us to affirm, that

Jefus Chrift, and *he alone*, can with propriety be faid to *have* the words of eternal life.

First, we may obferve, that Chrift has rendered the exiftence of a future and eternal ftate not probable, but abfolutely certain, by a pofitive and exprefs promife, fupported by transcendant authority ; and this furpaffes all reafoning, when the queftion is about a matter of fact. The moft ingenious and plaufible reafonings of a *Socrates* and a *Plato* were at beft hypothetical ; they were liable to objections, and accompanied with doubts, while an exprefs promife properly fupported, is liable to none. God fends his Son into the world, cloathed with all the awful and attracting characters of a Divine miffion, to declare to mankind that there is a ftate of glory and felicity referved for the righteous beyond the grave. From this folemn, clear, and repeated declaration of the Son of God, the moft perfect conviction and affurance muft fill the heart, with refpect to this great and transporting truth. We have the promife of the living and true God, whose *promifes are all yea and amen*, faithful and fure. *Let not your hearts be troubled*, faith the Divine Saviour ;

Saviour ; *ye believe in God, believe also in me.*

We may observe, secondly, that Christ has the words of eternal life in a very peculiar manner, as it is by his mediation and sufferings that this inestimable blessing is rendered attainable by sinful man. The consciousness of guilt cast an awful cloud on the prospect of death, and the voice of conscience made offending creatures behold immortality with an anxious eye of perplexity and fear. Even the systems of the most eminent Pagan sages were rather adapted to inspire painful apprehension than to excite hope ; and *wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and present myself before the Most High God*, was the universal language of the guilty nations, whom the *fear of death held in bondage*, and who, by sacrifices and burnt-offerings, sought to appease an offended Deity. But the angelic armies, when the Son of God descended upon earth, proclaimed *peace* from heaven, and *good-will towards men* ; and thus the *Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world*, has, truly, *the words of mercy and salvation*, that open the *gates of life eternal*, and calls from his cross,

Look unto me, all ye ends of the earth, and be saved.

Thirdly, If the Divine Saviour has assured us of eternal life by an express promise, and rendered it accessible to penitent offenders by his meritorious death and sufferings, he has also farther confirmed its certainty, by his resurrection from the dead; for by that triumphant act he is become the pledge and the model of the resurrection of his servants to eternal life and felicity.

But a fourth consideration, which is of high importance on this subject, (and which I have had principally in view in treating it,) is the elevated and explicit language in which both Christ and his apostles speak of the nature and circumstances of this *eternal life*. In entering, it is true, on this part of our subject, we must carefully remember, that a *distinct* and *complete* account of the nature and enjoyments of a future world is impossible, in the present state of our existence: nay, were it *possible*, it would not be *expedient*, as in many respects it would defeat the purposes of that state of probation and trial in which we are actually placed. The nature and enjoyments of a future

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ture state are revealed to us with a degree of light sufficient to elevate our views, exalt our hopes, and serve as motives and encouragement to a virtuous course ; but they are not unfolded with that circumstantial detail, with that overpowering lustre and glory which would fill us with astonishment, and render all our enjoyments and occupations, here below, insipid. The positive and express declarations of Christ and his apostles, on this solemn subject, are nevertheless sublime in their simplicity, and announce things far beyond the investigation of human wisdom. These declarations are reducible to *four* points, which we shall consider successively : An exemption from evil—the pleasures of *sense* in a resurrection-body—the pleasures of extensive *knowledge* in an improved and exalted mind—and the pleasures of benevolence and order in an enlarged and sanctified heart.

I. The first idea then, and the lowest that the gospel leads us to form of a future and eternal state, represents it to our hopes, as a state of exemption from all evil, natural and moral. The exemption from natural evil is plainly mentioned in the seventh chapter of

the Book of the *Revelations*, where it is said of the righteous in a future world—that *they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, and that God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes**; and again, *that there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying—neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away—and he that sat upon the throne said, Behold I make all things new †*. Here we see by a positive promise, by one of those express declarations, which surpasses far, in the satisfaction it administers, the most probable speculations, that the infirmities and pains, the afflictions and calamities, that embitter our best enjoyments here below, shall have no place in that blessed world to which Christianity directs our views. There the corroding anguish of poverty—the dangerous snares of riches, the anxious tumults of ambition, the disappointments and vexations of life, the changes and revolutions of inconstant fortune, shall be no more experienced, nor even known; nor shall the heart ever feel, in these blessed mansions, that bitterness

* Ch. v. 16, 17.

† Ch. xxi. 4, 5.

and

and dejection, that flows from the impulse of nature and friendship, when death dissolves the tender and amiable connexions they have formed.

But it is not only from natural evil and suffering that we are promised an absolute exemption, a complete deliverance, but also from *moral disorder* and transgression. Yet a little while, and sin shall be no more. The *spirits of the just made perfect* are the inhabitants of that glorious state, and, according to the express declaration of St. John, *There shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination* *. In that blessed world the love of pleasure shall never be separated from the love of order; and therefore the righteous shall remain in it without spot and blameless. The sincere and humble Christian, who passes in this state of trial so many moments of ingenuous sorrow and dejection, in reflecting upon his weak humours, his unruly passions, his propensities towards transgression, his coldness and indifference towards the sublime objects of his

* Rev. xxi. 27.

Christian vocation, his misimprovement of mercies, talents, and privileges, shall be delivered from all these sources of anxiety and trouble in a future scene; for there our affections shall be exercised towards their proper objects, and in due proportion; and human nature, which has been here, for wise reasons, made *subject to vanity*, shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God*.

Now, had the Gospel of Christ given us no more than this negative account of a future state, it would have set the *doctrine of eternal life* in a much more comfortable light than it appeared in the conjectures of the antient philosophers, and particularly in the wild fiction of *transmigration*, which exhibited the most disagreeable prospects to the generality of mankind, and set before them new labours, new toils, new temptations and trials at the end of this mixed and imperfect state. And, indeed, it was only a Divine revelation, that could assure us of this total exemption from evil in a succeeding scene. Our inductions

* Rom. viii. 25,

from experience and analogy could give no encouragement to such an expectation. But this negative account of our manner of existence in a future state is accompanied with several circumstances of a positive nature, expressly revealed by him, who *bath the words of eternal life*, and his holy apostles. They promise us,

2dly, In that state, the *pleasures of sense in a glorified body*. This, perhaps, is an object of faith, which will appear attracting to many, who have little or no idea of felicity, where the external senses are not concerned. And, indeed, where something analogous to these senses does not exist, we can scarcely form any idea of true felicity; because, without these, we can have no notion of that mutual intercourse and society, which are essential to human nature in all the periods of its existence, and the progressive steps of its improvement. Thus the resurrection of a glorious body was not only congenial to the nature of man, but essential to his improvement and felicity. It was, however, a mystery to the Pagan world, whose vain philosophy regarded the body as the prison of the soul, and the only source of
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its degradation and misery. But hear him, who has the words of eternal life, declaring by his apostle, that this *corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality: It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power—It is sown a NATURAL body, it is raised a SPIRITUAL body* *. This is, indeed, a declaration equally *new* and surprising; and though we cannot form, at present, a complete or distinct notion of all the qualities, powers, and senses which the Divine munificence may communicate to the resurrection-body; yet, from the description of the apostle, we may acquire some faint conceptions, both of its nature and its enjoyments. By the denomination of a *spiritual body* we are led to understand a body not *spiritual*, as to its substance, for that is a contradiction; but a body animated by an inward *spirit* of life, which renders it essentially and intrinsically immortal, a body free from the more turbulent and gross appetites of our present animal frame, and resembling, in its activity, the rapid motions of spiritual and angelic natures—a body that

* 1 Cor. xv. 53, &c.

shall be in perfect union with the faculties of the soul in the highest degrees of their improvement, *and a proper habitation and instrument of perception and action to the spirits of the just made perfect.*

It is remarkable that our best modern improvements in the knowledge of the natural world afford a pleasing, and not improbable illustration of this doctrine of scripture. When we consider the subtile, refined, and active nature of certain material substances, the beautiful forms and modifications of which they are susceptible, and how near they approach to the rapid motions of the *spiritual* Being, we may the more easily imagine the possibility of a very sublime degree of beauty and perfection in the resurrection-body.

From all this, by an easy induction, we may conclude that the state, which is to complete the felicity of Christians, will be a *visible* world, and will administer to the external senses many noble objects of contemplation and enjoyment. That God who formed the eye to contemplate the beauty and order of his works, and the ear to hear the harmony of sounds, and to serve as the instrument of rational

tional and social intercourse, and who has promised one day to restore these admirable organs to the human frame, will not surely restore them in vain. They will have their uses and their objects; the grand spectacle of nature changed and improved—the marvellous marks of wisdom, power, and goodness that shine forth in the works of God, will furnish abundant matter for the employment and gratification of these improved and noble senses. If God has given here below, in the kingdom of nature, such rich displays of wisdom, power, and goodness, how much more shall *these* be displayed in that kingdom of glory above, which is more immediately filled with his presence and majesty? If, in this changing and transitory scene of things, which passeth away as *a tale that is told*, the Divine munificence has opened to us so many sources of external enjoyment, so wonderfully diversified our pleasures and gratifications, what new sources of pleasure will he not open to his children and servants, when their state of trial being finished, they shall *enter into the joy of their Lord*?

But,

But, 3dly, a higher class of pleasures is manifestly pointed out to us by the express language of scripture, even the pleasures of *extensive knowledge*.

The apostle, in his 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, expresses himself thus: *Now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known* *. Here he declares intimate and *extensive knowledge* to be one of the essential ingredients of his future felicity. And, indeed, knowledge as it is one of the constituent parts of the dignity of our nature, so is it, in itself, a very noble source of pleasure and entertainment. But the value of knowledge rises in proportion to the excellence of the objects upon which it is exercised; what then are the objects that shall exercise the intellectual faculties of happy spirits in a future world? Christ himself furnishes us with an answer to this question, which human reason could never have answered with a satisfactory degree of certainty and evidence. *Blessed* (says he) *are the pure in heart, for they*

* Ch. xiii. 12.

shall see God; and agreeable to this declaration is that of the Saviour's beloved disciple *. *It doth not yet appear, what we shall be; but we know, that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.* There is certainly something too high for our present mode of conception in these two remarkable passages. They, however, imply the knowledge of the Divine perfections and counsels, as they are manifested in the works of nature, the government of Providence and the dispensation of grace. *To see God as he is,* can only mean such an immediate clear and certain knowledge of the Being of beings as *finite minds* are capable of acquiring. In this world the Christian sees God only by rising from the effects to the cause; but as, in this world, we see only a small part of the Divine works, a minute portion of that vast universe in which the perfections of the Most High stand so gloriously displayed; as the ways of Providence are, for the most part, hid from our short-sighted understandings, and the marvellous plan of redemption and grace unfolded

* 1 John, iii. 2.

but in part, so our knowledge here below is of necessity extremely limited and imperfect. But, in a future world, true Christians are led to expect a most advantageous change in this respect. By many express declarations of scripture they are encouraged to hope that their intellectual faculties shall be so improved and perfected, as to enable them to receive enlarged views and apprehensions of the Divine nature and perfections, and to make the noblest discoveries with respect to the wisdom of God in the government of the universe.

But however glorious this idea of the heavenly felicity may be, however noble the delights of exalted knowledge and of enlarged capacities may justly appear; yet a still nobler class of pleasures is promised, in a future world, by him who has the words of eternal life; even the pleasures of *benevolence* and *virtue* in an enlarged and sanctified heart. The holy scriptures are express and positive in this matter. They represent, in many places, the resemblance of the Deity, in his moral perfections, as both the character and felicity of blessed spirits; and this resemblance can

only consist in sanctity and benevolence. God is the *Holy One* by way of excellence; and the seraphims that surround the throne call out *Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts*. Moreover, *God is love, and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God and God in him* *. Thus sanctity, or the love of order and benevolence, or the love of all intelligent beings, as they are the noblest lines of the Divine image in the human soul, will prove also the chief springs of its eternal felicity. How beautiful and sublime, in this respect, is the doctrine of Christianity, which represents sanctity and love, not only as the preparation for happiness, but also as happiness itself; the very substance and essence of true felicity. And, indeed, they must be so. The human heart is so framed as to feel the most sincere delight, when it has pursued the paths of order and virtue, and a benevolent and charitable frame of soul does not only deliver from the painful tumults of malignant passions, but diffuses through the heart a sweet serenity, and inexpressible sensations of pleasure and delight.

* John, iv. 16.

Nay, the happiness of God springs from the consciousness of his supreme sanctity and unbounded goodness. Well then may we conclude, that the pursuit of order, and the exercise of benevolence, in sublime connexions with saints and angels, will be the grand source of felicity in the celestial mansions.

Happy, then, those who truly believe in him who *has the words of eternal life*! The day will come when a new and glorious state of things shall arise to their transported and astonished view; when their light shall be no more mingled with darkness, nor their virtue exercised by troubles and afflictions; and that day is not far off—yet a little while—and time shall give place to eternity, and death be swallowed up in immortal victory: then shall their faith be turned into sight, their hope into enjoyment, and their works shall be crowned with the incorruptible prize: then shall their bodies rise from the dust in honour and glory, and their souls be transformed into the image of the Divine perfections: then shall their faculties be enlarged, their views extended, their affections purified and ennobled, and their felicity secured through the

endless ages. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, thus, according to his abundant mercy has begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Christ, of an inheritance that is eternal, incorruptible, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for those who are kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation.*

Were we truly convinced of the certainty and reality of this glorious state—were we accustomed, by frequent meditation, to impress upon our minds lively feelings of those sublime prospects, which the munificence of God and the resurrection of Jesus have opened to our view, then should we live and act quite otherwise than, alas! the greatest part of us do. But this lively conviction of the Christian's destination to life eternal, and the habit of meditation on its grandeur and felicity, are too rare in the world. With respect to many, *the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not.* A gross and criminal ignorance in some, a sensual or a frivolous taste in others, prevent or destroy the salutary influence which the noble prospects and promises of the gospel are adapted to produce on thinking, attentive,

tentive, and ingenuous minds. What multitudes are there, that seem to propose to themselves no other felicity, no other enjoyments than the low and transitory pleasures of sense, and that for the short and fleeting moments of an uncertain life? If they look, at all, into futurity—if, at any time, they cast a thought forward to that solemn period when *time shall be no more*, the awful thought of eternity dejects their spirits and fills them with painful astonishment, rather than with transporting hope. And, O! how unhappy must they be who behold, with dejection and confusion, those very objects which are designed to constitute the felicity and glory of human nature? How unhappy must they be, who, with a negligence that is inconceivable, and looks like frenzy, trample, as it were, under foot, the greatest promises which God could make, and the most glorious gifts which he could bestow on miserable mortals! Here, indeed, the corruption of man appears in a point of view that astonishes and confounds. The pious and attentive mind which views, on the one hand, the munificence of God, and on the other, the perverse insensibility of man, is

naturally filled with amazement at this shocking appearance. Ah! let not this be our case! Christians, whom God has drawn from the dust, with a view to clothe you with glory and immortality; for whom Jesus has died upon the cross, that, by his triumphant resurrection and ascension, he might *abolish death*, and become the author and the pattern of your future felicity, look forward to that great day, when the *last trump shall sound*, and *the dead shall be raised incorruptible*. Accustom yourselves to behold that day with pleasure and hope, mixed, indeed, with awful sentiments of its solemnity and importance, and an humble sense of your own infirmities. But since the mercy of God, in Christ, is infinite to those who put their trust in him, let pleasure and hope be the reigning sentiments of your hearts, in the view of him *who has the words of eternal life*. For this purpose represent these future scenes frequently to your minds, that they may excite desire, and live in such a manner as will prepare you for the enjoyment of that blessed world, that this desire may be accompanied with transporting *hope*. Thrice happy those, who live here
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with an eye raised to immortality, and whose principal business, in a present world, is to lay up a good foundation for the time to come. Such happy souls are superior to the events of this uncertain state. Independent on the changes and revolutions of earthly things, with respect to their true well-being—their great prize is beyond time, and their eyes are fixed habitually upon it. Undisturbed with those tormenting fears, those vain desires and disorderly appetites that perplex the anxious children of this world, they enjoy, in the prospect of things eternal, a contentment and tranquillity truly divine. In the evils of life they have the noblest resources, and in the valley of death they shall have the most victorious support. That day, that shall bring terror and despair to those who have forgot the end of their being, and the grandeur of their destination, shall be to them a day of humble, yet complete triumph. Then shall they see, that Jesus is the *faithful* and the *true witness*, and shall enjoy the glories of that life and immortality that he has promised to his servants. Then transformed in-

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to the likeness of their Divine Redeemer in soul and in body, they shall shine, through eternity, like the *brightness of the firmament, and like the stars for ever and ever.* Amen.

DISCOURSE XIX.

On the Diversity of Rank and Station in Civil Society.

CORINTHIANS, xii. 18, 19, 20, 21.

BUT NOW HATH GOD SET THE MEMBERS;
 EVERY ONE OF THEM IN THE BODY, AS
 IT HATH PLEASSED HIM;
 AND IF THEY WERE ALL ONE MEMBER,
 WHERE WERE THE BODY?
 BUT NOW ARE THEY MANY MEMBERS,
 YET BUT ONE BODY.
 AND THE EYE CANNOT SAY UNTO THE
 HAND, I HAVE NO NEED OF THEE; NOR
 AGAIN, THE HEAD TO THE FEET, I
 HAVE NO NEED OF YOU.

WHEN we consider, with attention, the
 works of Nature, an immense variety
 of objects are presented to our view; and ne-
 vertheless,

vertheless, by their mutual relations and connexions, they only compose *one world*. In the same manner, the various characters, talents, capacities, and stations of men compose *one great society*, combined of many smaller ones, in every one of which the same uniformity and variety take place. We need not go farther, for an illustration of this general law of Providence, than the human frame; of which the different members, by their mutual relations and dependencies, constitute *one body*.

This latter object, by a beautiful figure, the apostle applies to the Christian church, and to the variety of spiritual gifts which were therein administered by the great *Father of lights*, for the edification of the whole *body of Christ*. His address was designed to correct the murmurs of those who complained of their inferior gifts, and of their filling lower and subordinate vocations in the service of the church. He observes, for this purpose, that as the human body is composed by the union of many members, whose various offices tend to the harmony and perfection of the whole, such was the case with the Christian church, of which
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they were members, and in which God had *set some for apostles, others for prophets, others for teachers*; after that, *miracles*, then *gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues*. All this diversity was so wisely arranged, that as *the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee*; nor again, *the hand to the feet, I have no need of you*; so the superior and inferior ministers of the Christian church were in a reciprocal dependence on each others services; and in the Christian church, as in the human body, *God hath set, or placed, the members, every one of them, as it hath pleased him*.

The figure, which the apostle applied to the diversity of stations and offices in the Christian church, is well adapted to represent the variety of stations and circumstances which diversify the face of civil society or human life in its present transitory form; and in this application of it we shall,

1. Consider this variety of stations and circumstances, and the wisdom of God in its appointment or permission.

2. Point out the duties and obligations which arise from this diversity, and the true method

method of rendering it as happy for the individual, as it is ornamental and beneficial to the whole.

I. There is a pleasing and a palpable display of the Divine wisdom in that part of God's providential government which we are now to consider, even in that variety of situations and circumstances which diversify the scene of human life. On the one hand, this variety flows naturally from the various talents, capacities, tastes, and characters of men, which have no small influence in fixing their external station and condition; though in the present state of human society this is often determined by birth and other accidental circumstances. On the other hand, this variety of stations and circumstances (like the variety of talents, capacities, and characters) is necessary to our living in society, in the performance of active duties, and the mutual intercourse of good offices. It may be doubted whether there be in the whole universe, even in heaven itself, any society, of which all the members have exactly the same capacities and stations. It is, at least, certain, that with respect to mankind, the variety we see before

our eyes is absolutely necessary; and that without it, activity, enjoyment, and even virtue, would suffer essentially. There can be no society without mutual dependence. We have no idea of mutual dependence without mutual wants, which suppose variety and even inequality in talent, capacity, station, or possessions. In a word, without diversity of station and circumstances, the high enjoyments of active benevolence and virtue would be entirely lost. What a motley scene of confusion, terror, and violence would human society be, if all were to govern, and none to obey! And if there were no stations, exposed, by their inferiority, to the hardships of indigence, the divine virtues of beneficence and liberality would lose all their exercise, and consequently all their energy and beauty: they would be no more *eyes* to the *blind*, nor *feet* to the *lame*; they would draw no more upon the generous benefactor “the blessing
“of him that was ready to perish, nor make
“the *widow’s heart* to sing for joy.” And is it not true, also, that the inferior stations or human life, and the adverse circumstances which often attend them, furnish matter for
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the exercise of the noblest virtues, whose pleasures and fruits, though often possessed in secret, have a venerable reality, and tend to lay the foundations of eternal enjoyment? Patience and resignation, humility and temperance, a sound mind and a sound body, are the more peculiar fruits of piety in these stations and circumstances; as gratitude, liberality, and benevolence are the virtues which give a true and genuine lustre to elevation and prosperity. Both states, and, indeed, all our stations and circumstances, are means of improvement; and important advantages, with respect to true and lasting felicity, may be derived from them all; for there is nothing ordered or permitted without a wise purpose in the divine government. As the light of the sun, reflected from different objects, produces beautiful colours in a great variety, so true piety, shedding its influence on the different characters, stations, and circumstances of men, exhibits noble lines of its superior beauty and diversified lustre. It adds a new splendour to the throne, and gives a cheerful and pleasing aspect to the cottage; it dignifies and directs the talents and labours of the statesman;

statesman; it animates and maintains the valour of the soldier, and softens his ferocity; it adorns with humility and usefulness the knowledge of the learned, and suggests modesty and docility to the ignorant; it mitigates, by humanity, the superiority of the master, and renders the inferiority of the servant respectable by integrity and principle. Falling upon this variety of objects, piety and virtue display all their glorious colours, and shew some lines of that beauty and felicity which, in God's wise and good government, will be their immortal fruits, for intelligent and moral beings of all ranks and orders, in a future œconomy.

Thus, according to the expression of our text, *God hath set the members, every one of them in the body*; that is, (as we apply the expression to our present subject,) all the conditions, circumstances, relations, and stations of human life are arranged, in consequence of the permission or appointment of God's all-wise and gracious Providence. "He hath set the members every one in the body," *as it hath pleased him*; not that there is any thing arbitrary in the dispensations of divine Providence;

dence ; the figure of the text is a preservative against this interpretation of the term ; for the placing of the members in the human body is so far from being arbitrary, or without wise and good intention, that they could not have been placed otherwise without producing deformity and disorder. Thus God has arranged the circumstances of human life *as it hath pleased him* : but nothing can please him which does not answer the purposes of his wisdom and goodness, and tend, *ultimately*, to the order of his works and the happiness of his creatures. And, indeed, this variety of station and condition, as it opens a large field for social action and virtuous energy, so it tends directly and effectually to the general good. Would not the comforts and conveniencies of human life be greatly diminished, if there did not exist a vast diversity of offices and employments—some more, others less honourable—some even mean and servile, which are necessary to the supply of our various wants ? If a perfect equality took place among men, and every one was obliged to undergo for himself that diversity of labour which is requisite to procure the necessary and ordinary comforts

forts of life, what would be the consequence? All the efforts of genius would be suppressed, the progress of knowledge suspended, and the intellectual powers of man, which are susceptible of such high improvement and productive of such pure and elevated pleasure, would be either neglected, or confined in their exertions to a low sphere, to the sordid cares and objects of animal life. It is the variety, under consideration, which gives occasion to all the noble exertions of genius, benevolence, and virtue; and forms that chain of mutual dependence between high and low, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, which renders them, according to the expression of St. Peter, *subject one to another* *.

Accordingly, the voice of revelation as well as of reason proclaims the wisdom of God in the diversified scene of human life. *It is the Lord that maketh poor and maketh rich; he bringeth low and lifteth up* †. *The powers that be are ordained of God* ‡, and let every

* Eph. v. 5.

† 1 Sam. ii. 7.

‡ Rom. xiii. 1. 5.

man, (says the apostle,) wherein he is called, abide therein with God.

It may be alledged, that this diversity of stations and circumstances, though it contributes, by its general tendency, to the good of the whole, bears hard, nevertheless, upon those individuals who are in the lower stations and unfavourable circumstances of life : but this seeming objection to God's providential wisdom and goodness will vanish, if we consider the following things :

1st, That in point of contentment and true happiness, the lower stations are not always inferior to the higher. The peasant is often happier than the prince, the servant than his master, the man who enjoys the competence of a middle state, than the splendid son of prosperity, *who fares sumptuously every day.* Why ? because the sources of true enjoyment, which lie in the faith, the virtue, and the hopes of the Christian, are accessible equally to all, in all stations and in all circumstances. You know, also, that, even out of the hardships of indigence and the bosom of affliction, the providence and grace of God may draw
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that salutary improvement, those *fruits of righteousness* which are productive of *peace, joy, and assurance for ever*. When we hear the good man pour forth such strains as these,—*thou hast put more joy in my heart than in theirs whose corn and wine have increased—It is good for me that I have been afflicted—Though the fig-tree should not blossom, neither should there be fruit in the vine; though the labour of the olive should fail and the fields should yield no meat; though the flock should be cut off from the fold and the herd from the stall, yet will I rejoice in God, and joy in the God of my salvation;—*what must we conclude? The natural conclusion is, that it is no solid objection to the wisdom and goodness of Providence, that many are placed, *for a short time*, (for such is the measure of our present state,) in the lower stations of human society, and the unfavourable circumstances which often attend them.

2. It is very remarkable, that, almost generally speaking, there is such an accommodation of the inclinations of men to the places they fill, and the spheres in which they are providentially destined to move and act in human life, that this consideration is, alone, sufficient

to remove objections. Where do envy and murmuring most frequently take place? Is it not between persons of nearly the same rank and station in life? The peasant does not repine at his condition, when compared with that of the magistrate, nor does the latter feel any anxiety at his not being a prince. The exceptions to this general rule are not many. Ambition and genius have, indeed, sometimes raised men from the most obscure situations to high spheres of action. But these cases are rare, and can never become common, until civil society loses its proper and salutary tenor, and is thrown into confusion and anarchy, by the licentious profligacy and unbridled passions of the wicked. In the natural course of things, the anxiety even of the ambitious is rather to be distinguished in his sphere than to get out of it; and we generally see birth, habit, and education attaching men to their respective places in human life.

But a third consideration which removes all difficulties and objections respecting inequalities of station and condition among men is this, not only that the sources of true felicity are open to all, but that the inequalities complained

plained of are short and transitory. They are the vision of a day, compared with our endless duration; and when the vocations we have filled on the scene of life shall be successively concluded—the sovereign and the subject, the magistrate and the peasant, and all other temporary characters and distinctions shall vanish, but the *man* shall remain, and his future and eternal lot shall be determined, not by his past, terrestrial, and momentary distinctions, but by the piety with which he adorned elevation or dignified obscurity,—by the virtues which have shed a benignant lustre on his prosperous day, or the patience and resignation with which he has borne his burden in the day of his adversity. There is no doubt but that a future state shall display this momentous truth to our astonished view, and will correct the erroneous judgments we formed here below with respect to the characters, the condition, and the happiness of man in this short passage to his eternal destination. In the mean time, as the *poor and the rich meet together, and God is the maker of them all*; and as the various stations and circumstances of human life are the appointments of God's ruling wisdom and

goodness, calling us all, in our respective conditions, to enter into his views and improve his dispensations; let us hear his voice—let us solemnly attend to the conclusions relative to our sentiments and conduct, which are deducible from the diversity we have been now considering, and which will render it as happy to the individual as it is useful to the whole, This is the important duty which we come now to explain and enforce in our *second Head*.

II. The first improvement we should make of the diversity which the Almighty has permitted or appointed in the stations and circumstances of men, is a contented spirit and a patient continuance in our station, if we cannot change it advantageously, by such methods as are consistent with the principles, not of worldly wisdom, but of Christian virtue. We have seen already how conspicuous the wisdom of God appears in the vast variety of human conditions. We have seen that the inequalities, of which some have complained, are *necessary* to the harmony, the comfort, and support of civil society; and we learn from day to day to appreciate with more truth
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and precision that phantom of *equality* which can never exist, but whose visionary standard is raised as a pretext for all the plagues of devastation and sanguinary violence, which, in this period of darkness and confusion, degrade and afflict human society. But above all, we see, in the Divine promises, after this short and fleeting life, a sublime change, which opens to man new scenes of existence and felicity. Remain, therefore, in your present stations, whatever they may be, with patience and contentment, in the pleasing hope, that your faith and patience shall be crowned with stations more exalted and happy, when the *time of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.*

It is not, however, meant by this, that every man must consider himself as confined, by the order of Providence, to the post which he actually fills, or that he may not fairly attempt to rise from a lower to a higher station. On the contrary, nothing is more lawful than to attempt to better our stations in life by fair and virtuous means: it is even laudable and useful, as it excites genius, promotes industry, and improves society. Besides, we find, not

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feldom, in the obscure walks of life, persons competent, by capacity and character, to fill places of eminence and importance; and such changes we see, accordingly, take place in the world. It is not so rare to see the servant become a master in his turn, nor to see the poor arising to opulence and prosperity. So that we only mean to enjoin here a contented continuance in stations which we cannot lawfully better. This precept is so much the more important, as there is no station in life without its peculiar crosses and inconveniencies, and a submission to these is a very essential part of the duty under consideration. High and opulent stations expose to envy, jealousy, censure, and cares. Low and less honourable situations are too often accompanied with ill-founded contempt, painful labour, and the hardships of poverty. Submission, therefore, to the inconveniencies either natural or accidental that attend these different conditions, is a duty founded on the wisdom of God, on the one hand, and on the ignorance of man, with respect to the things that are truly good for him, on the other. But as there is no state in life without its inconveniencies, and
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which, of consequence, does not require some measure of patience and submission; so it may be observed that there is no condition without its peculiar mercies and advantages. There is in every situation a mixture of good as well as evil, something that justifies the oblation of praise, as well as resignation:—and this leads us to a

Second practical conclusion deducible from the diversity of conditions in life, even the obligation of gratitude to God for the blessings that attend our respective stations and circumstances in a present world. It is the character of certain melancholy and selfish minds, to let their views always centre in the disadvantages and crosses that attend their condition—and we may have often heard the evils, the troubles and calamities of the world, painted in the blackest colours, and with the greatest exaggeration, by those who were visited with the smallest portion of them. This exaggeration proceeds from that ignoble and excessive self-love, which is ever unsatisfied and ungrateful; and it is incompatible with the genuine spirit of piety and virtue. The true Christian will be attentive to all the advantages

vantages of his condition, and thankful to the supreme and bountiful hand from whence they proceed. He will not forget any of the benefits of his God ; and his gratitude for the temporal and spiritual blessings which are mixed with his lot will enable him to bear its disadvantages with the greater serenity and resignation. Gratitude and resignation go hand in hand through the blessings and trials of the good man, who, raising his eye habitually to the dispenser of his lot, alternately magnifies his goodness, and *kisses the rod* of his paternal wisdom.

But if the diversity of conditions and circumstances in life call each one to acknowledge gratefully the blessings that may accompany, or the advantages that may be derived from their respective conditions, so are we bound, thirdly, to guard against those *temptations* to which we are more peculiarly exposed by the state and circumstances in which we are placed. It is not easy to maintain a sound mind, a meek and virtuous spirit, in a state of elevation, power, and opulence. Truly critical is such a state, and many are the temptations which attend it. It engenders

ders a spirit of independence—a sensual frame and temper of mind—and furnishes incitements to intemperance, and all the vices of a luxurious life. A peculiar and solemn voice is therefore addressed to the opulent, to guard against these vices by the efforts of piety and virtuous principle. They are peculiarly called to preserve the soundness of their minds, by the sacred culture of reason and religion; that thus, amidst honours and elevation, they may be preserved from the insolence of pride and the barbarity of ambition; and, amidst the intoxicating seductions of opulence, may not be enslaved by those low and frivolous pleasures, those idle revels of intemperance and folly, which are the degradation of human nature, the ruin of its moral taste, its improvable and noble faculties, and its immortal prospects. Amidst the straits of poverty, and the difficulties of a low or adverse condition, the Christian is obliged to guard against the temptation which this situation holds forth to murmuring impatience, and the use of criminal means of bettering his circumstances and supplying his wants.

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The fourth, and most important practical inference from the subject we have been treating, is the obligation we are under to discharge the particular duties which are connected with our particular and respective stations and circumstances in life. There are certain obligations and duties incumbent on all men, in all circumstances, considered as reasonable creatures and Christians; for they have all the same rule of action, founded on the universal sense of good and evil; and the same path to happiness, even the sacred path of religion, which the *Father of lights* has opened to the faith and piety of his children and servants in all the stations of human life, from the highest to the lowest. But there are also duties and virtues of a more relative and particular kind; which are determined by special situations and circumstances. The high and low, the rich and poor, have their respective obligations. The variety of conditions gives occasion for displaying all the different kinds and branches of Christian virtue. Every one's station may be his monitor here, and shew him *what is good*, and what *God* requireth of him in his particular sphere. They who are

clothed with power and authority ought to know that Providence has not so highly exalted them from any predelection for their persons, but to impose upon them the most solemn, honourable, and important duties. He has charged them with a sublime and beneficent commission to maintain order and peace, to promote justice and equity, to render all the efforts of their virtuous ambition conducive to the well-being of those who are under their authority. Under such a combination of grandeur and goodness, the aspect of elevation becomes amiable and humane, and obscurity looks cheerful, contented, and happy. The advantages and means of those in power, for promoting these godlike purposes, are ample and abundant. They can do more by a word, than ordinary mortals can effect by the most laborious efforts: but in proportion to the abundance of their means, will their responsibility be solemn and awful. The use they have made of their advantages and means will one day be tried at that great tribunal, where their transitory grandeur will disappear, and they shall be judged, like the meanest of the people, by Him who alone reigns

reigns for ever, with perfect equity and unerring wisdom. With respect to the rich in *this world's goods*, if God permits them to enjoy largely the sweets of their prosperity, he at the same time calls them to duties which administer a delicate pleasure to the generous mind ; he calls them to the relief of the poor and needy, whom he has left to their mercy, that they might enjoy the exalted satisfaction of being fellow-workers with him, *who is good unto all*. He calls also the virtuous children of adversity to patience and resignation, during the temporary sufferings to which they are subjected, in the hopes of a better and eternal country, in comparison with which the transitory distinctions of a present life are of little or no account. The duties which peculiarly become a middle station in life are industry and prudence, and a modest and sober simplicity of manners, which render the calm scene of mediocrity truly estimable and productive of comfort.

Thus, under the empire of the universal Parent, who has diversified the stations and circumstances of his immense family for the good of the whole, every member of that family shall
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enjoy individually, in the proper season, that happiness which they have sought in the paths of religion and virtue, whether in high or in low station ; and then it shall appear, that even in the most unpleasing situations of this transitory life, *all the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth to those that keep his covenant and testimonies.*

DISCOURSE XX.

On St. Peter's Denial of his Master.

LUKE, xxii. 61, 62.

AND THE LORD TURNED, AND LOOKED
UPON PETER ; AND PETER REMEMBER-
ED THE WORD OF THE LORD, HOW HE
SAID UNTO HIM, BEFORE THE COCK
CROW, THOU SHALT DENY ME THRICE.
AND PETER WENT OUT AND WEPT
BITTERLY.

THIS is one of the affecting passages in the
history of our blessed Lord, of which
we ought not to lose sight, if we desire to run
our Christian race with perseverance, and
prove *faithful unto death*. The subject it offers
to our consideration is interesting in various
respects : it exhibits salutary views of human
infirmity

infirmity and Divine condescension, a warning against presumption, a call to circumspection and vigilance, and a comfortable display of Divine mercy, shed forth upon the pious anguish of sincere repentance. In St. Peter's denial of his Master, a warning voice from the earth exhorts him, *who thinketh he standeth, to take heed lest he fall*: but in the recovery of this backsliding Saint, a comforting voice, as it were, from heaven, calls to the sincere and penitent Christian, *I will never leave thee nor forsake thee*.

In treating this important subject, we shall,
1st, Consider the denial of St. Peter, in the causes which gave rise to it, and the peculiar circumstances that aggravate its guilt:

2dly, The repentance of the fallen apostle, with the means that produced it, the qualities that attended it, and the fruits that followed it:—and,

3dly, We shall consider this signal event in its tendency to confirm our faith and to direct our conduct.

I. When Christ had delivered his person into the hands of his enemies, the time came when the faith and stedfast resolution of his

disciples were to meet with a sharp trial. Accordingly, knowing the weakness of his sincere but feeble servants, the good Master pleaded with the multitude, which came out to seize him, for their liberty, saying, as we find it in the gospel of St. John *. *If it is me that ye seek let these go away.* But on this occasion, the bold and impetuous spirit of St. Peter hindered him from associating the impulse of zeal with the dictates of prudence. He followed Christ at a certain distance; and, not satisfied with avoiding the danger of which he had been warned, he went into the court of the high priest, and mingled with the crowd who were waiting the issue of Christ's trial in the council of Caiphas. But how discouraging was the scene which here presented itself to the ardent and anxious disciple! His Master, his friend in the hands of his enemies, and submitting to their violence, was an object every way proper to deject his spirit. It was an object shocking to the views which Peter, most probably, as yet retained of the grandeur of the Messiah; and no doubt it

* John, xviii. 18.

filled his mind with the deepest perplexity. In this distressing moment, his faith is surprised by a sudden assault. A servant maid beholds him with an earnest look, and says, *This man was also with him.* At this discovery, his fears were alarmed; death and martyrdom arise to his view; his faith is eclipsed; he falls from his stedfastness, and denies his Master; as we see in the 17th verse of this chapter. St. Matthew observes, that after the first denial, Peter went out of the palace into the porch, probably overpowered with a sense of his danger, his weakness, and his crime: but a second assault met him there, when he hoped to escape; and, as one crime brings on another, when conscience has once yielded to temptation, he repeats the denial of his Master with an oath. A third assault finishes the defeat of the falling disciple, and produces a third denial, with new and aggravated circumstances of guilt. What a rapid succession of crimes do we find here, in a good man, a chosen saint! and where is the heart that will not take the alarm at a view of human weakness, so affectingly exemplified in the case before us?

II. If we pass from the crime of St. Peter, to the *causes* which contributed to his lamentable fall, we shall find some views of human nature which are worthy of our serious meditation, and will lead us, particularly, to avoid laying too much stress on natural good qualities, before they have acquired the purity, consistence, and gracious humility of Christian virtues. There was something frank, generous, ardent, and bold, in the character of St. Peter. He had all the qualities that form the Christian hero, when these qualities were tempered by humility, sanctified by grace, directed by religious truth, and improved by experience; and we see, in effect, what a glorious lustre they afterwards shed upon the ministry of the man who had denied his Master, and said that *he knew him not*. But now they were, in part, the causes of his fall. His boldness and ardour, in their natural workings, produced self-confidence and temerity, which removed a proper sense of his frailty, and a just apprehension of his danger. When his Divine Master predicted the apostasy of his disciple, and said to him, *Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice*, it was pre-

— presumption, and not insincerity, which dictated that pompous answer. *Though I should die with thee, yet I will not deny thee. Though all should deny thee, yet will I not deny thee.* Here courage produced presumption, and presumption a fall.

The natural ardour of this apostle contributed to produce temerity and imprudence in acting: it excited him to encounter a trial to which he was unequal. Had he been more calm and sedate, he would not have entered into the palace of Caiphas, where he had no vocation; for the time was not yet come, when he was to brave the world and all its opposition, even in the face of martyrdom and death. Nor were the succours as yet vouchsafed, which were to render the cause of his Divine master triumphant over all his enemies. But the natural fervour of St. Peter rendered him blind to these considerations; and thus he was vanquished, after the boldest professions of firmness and perseverance. In the ordinary course of life, the greatest dependance is not always to be placed on those who are the most eager and ardent in forming resolutions; but rather on such as, having deliberately

considered the difficulties they are to encounter, are prepared for overcoming them. It is also observable, that God's paternal wisdom is often remarkably displayed in adapting providential trials to the characters and predominant passions of his servants, to correct their faults by experimental proofs of their unhappy effects, and thus to reinstate and confirm them in the paths of wisdom and virtue. Such was the case with St. Peter, in that mortifying occurrence which is related in our text.

Deplorable indeed was the fall of this disciple, as you will easily perceive, when, after having observed its causes, you consider the circumstances which aggravate its guilt. For *whom* did he deny? It was the *holy* and the *just*—the model of all virtue, human and divine: it was his Master and his Friend, to whom he had professed the most tender and ardent attachment; who had always given him peculiar tokens of his attention and love, and marked him as a great and signal instrument in the propagation of his gospel. And *when* did Peter deny his Master? It was in the day of his adversity, when he looked about, *and there was none to help him*: it was
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in one of those dark and tryings seasons, when the effusions of friendship are always the most tender, and even rise to heroic efforts to bring succour and relief to suffering virtue: it was in such an hour of calamity and distress that the feeble disciple disowned his Master, and uttered those cruel words, *I know him not.*—*Thou knowest him not!*—Thou knowest not him, whom thou didst declare to be *the Son of the living God*; and to whom, but a few days before, thou didst address that sublime and affectionate answer to a pathetic question, *Lord, to whom should we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life!*

Thus you see the criminal nature, and some of the aggravating circumstances, of that ignoble fall, that covered with shame a chosen apostle; a shame, however, soon to be effaced by the glorious lustre of his happy restoration. For if we see, in Peter's denial of his Master, what man is, when left to his weakness and his passions, the repentance of this fallen disciple opens a new and a very different scene, which exhibits affecting views of Divine mercy, and of the triumphs of returning virtue, when supported from above. It is this

repentance, with the *characters* that distinguished it, and the *fruits* that followed it, that we come now to consider in our second head.

II. We have been contemplating a painful object—we have seen in a man, whose heart was radically good, the power of religious principle suspended, faith eclipsed, and virtue overpowered, by a sudden temptation. In this humbling situation was St. Peter: but the compassionate Master was not unmindful of his feeble and vanquished servant. And here a scene ensues, which is short, but affecting; and, in the beautiful simplicity of the narration before us, presents a singular mixture of the *pathetic* and the *sublime*: for when the offence was completed, *the cock crew*. This was, if we may so speak, the signal for conscience to awake from its slumber. *Then the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter; and Peter went out and wept bitterly*. We may conceive the feelings of the alarmed disciple, at this affecting moment: but who shall attempt to express the energy of that look which the Saviour cast on his feeble servant, whose heart it pierced with a sense of his guilt? We can,
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however, represent to ourselves, more or less, the serene majesty of that look, recalling to the disciple the grandeur and goodness of the Master he had denied, and, with an affecting mixture of clemency and reproach, rekindling love, exciting contrition and restoring the momentary apostate to himself, his Saviour, and his God.

And Peter went out and wept bitterly. Many things will strike an attentive mind and a feeling heart, in these few words. How speedy the repentance of this good man! How soon is his candid heart alarmed, and how quickly is he melted into tears of compunction by the sense of his crime! No illusions of self-love suspend or suppress the feelings of a faithful conscience; no delays, suggested by a corrupt indolence, retard the salutary work of repentance: he went out speedily from the palace of the high priest, trusting himself no longer in that dreadful place, where temptation had assaulted him with such dismal success. He retired into a solitary place; and there, between God and his own soul, he poured forth the abundance of his penitential sorrow. He got no more than one look of his Master, who is
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now gone to close his eyes in an ignominious death. He scarcely expects to see him any more. He represents to his mind the blessed Jesus, in his spotless innocence—in his Divine virtues—loaded with chains, covered with reproaches, and denied by him in this destitute condition, when *he looked about, and there was none to help him*. He remembers the indulgent tenderness of the Saviour to him, and the affectionate advice he had so often given him, in times of trial and danger: he calls to mind the promises of fidelity that he had made to his Master in the vehemence of his zeal, the shameful and criminal manner in which he had violated his solemn engagements, and the compassion and patience of the Divine Man, who gave his falling disciple no other mark of resentment than an earnest look. And when all these affecting circumstances arose to his recollection, they pierced his ingenuous heart, and he *wept bitterly*.

He wept bitterly. Well does the eloquent simplicity of these few words express the nature of Peter's repentance, the anguish of his generous heart, the sincerity of his pious contrition and sorrow! His tears were not the
tears

tears of despair; *the sorrow of the world, that worketh death, had no part in them.* The love of his Divine Master, the ingratitude of a criminal though momentary denial, the awful view of offended Heaven, and the image of Christ's celestial virtue that arises to his troubled mind—all these recollections draw forth the tears of pious contrition and generous remorse. Sacred tears! they flowed from a sense of offended goodness; and no prospect of impunity would have dried them, without the comforts of returning virtue, and the fruits of true repentance, which are *peace and assurance for ever.*

And glorious indeed were the fruits that crowned the repentance of this apostle! amazing the change that was wrought in him after this event! He rose triumphant from his fall, and a new lustre adorned his virtues, purified in the furnace of trial and affliction. His presumption was changed into humble fortitude; the ardour of his temper was modified into stedfast zeal and resolute perseverance; he was no more a *reed shaken by the wind*, but a rock, against which the storms of adversity and persecution spent their force in vain.

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He, who lately trembled at the voice of a servant maid, is the first who preaches a crucified Saviour in the streets of Jerusalem, in the face of persecution and death. And though, after his happy restoration, nothing could vanquish his intrepidity, or even damp his courage, yet his humility and meekness were equal to his constancy and fortitude. No more boasting comparisons in his own favour! No more self-sufficiency! The remembrance of his fall had suppressed all the motions of pride and presumption: and it is worthy of being remarked here, that when, on a certain occasion, Jesus said unto him, *Simon Peter, lovest thou me more than these do?* he declines the comparison; and humbly appealing to the Searcher of hearts for the sincerity of his affection, he replies to his Divine Master in the language of modest confidence, and says, *Lord, thou who knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee.*

Such were the blessed fruits of Peter's repentance, which changed the anguish and bitterness of his soul into that *peace of God that passeth understanding*; and, after tears shed in the night-season, brought joy and rejoicing with

with the return of the morning. Merciful are the ways of Heaven to erring man, as the gospel of grace and truth shows; not only by reviving promises, but also by affecting examples. And in all its circumstances, presented with such simplicity, what example can be more affecting than that of our text? It remains, now, to consider this signal event in its happy tendency to confirm our faith, and to direct our conduct. This is what we proposed to do in the *third* head.

III. Observe here, first, what a bright lustre the penitential tears and sorrow of St. Peter shed upon the character and mission of our Blessed Lord. Had not Christ been the holy and the just, the true Messiah; wherefore should Peter have wept so bitterly for having denied him? Who would take shame to himself, and feel the pangs of remorse, for having denied an impostor? And was there ever a man who, after having denied an impostor, would not only repent in the dust, but in the face of death defend his cause against the powers of the world, after he had expired in the agonies of an ignominious cross? In all the events of this remarkable history,

history, the spotless innocence of the Divine Saviour is gloriously displayed. Even in the desertion of his friends, as well as in the rage of his enemies, his celestial virtues *shine forth as the light*, and his *righteousness as the sun at noon-day*.

In the second place, If we consider the fall and restoration of St. Peter in a point of view relative to practice, we shall find them instructive in several respects, of great moment to our moral and religious conduct. We see, among other things, a very affecting example of the precious advantages of virtuous habit, by the facility it gives to the repentance of the good man, when he has fallen before a sudden temptation. One look of the Saviour was sufficient for the recovery of his fallen disciple. A single look melted him into the tears and sorrows of repentance. Let us take this for the test of our religious and moral state, when in any instance we fall from our steadfastness. If, when we have yielded to temptation, an ingenuous sorrow dejects our hearts, and a speedy return to the paths of virtue crowns our repentance; if, upon the alarms and terrors of a faithful conscience, reason and virtue resume

resume their ascendant, and a painful reflexion on offended goodness animates anew our zealous efforts to serve the greatest and best of Beings; this may encourage us to look up to his throne of mercy with humble confidence, and to *go on in our way rejoicing* in hope. To-day, if ye will hear his voice, *harden not your hearts* in that lethargic insensibility, and those delays of repentance, which are ominous symptoms of a dangerous state.

It is certain that the restoration of St. Peter is a truth, full of encouragement and consolation to sincere Christians. In it they see the mercy of that *God, who desireth not the death of a sinner*; who *knows our frame, and remembers that we are but dust*; who beholds, with an eye of compassion, the infirmities of his servants, and never fails either to support them in the hour of temptation, or, when they fall, to restore them, by a godly sorrow and a solitary repentance, to the paths of virtue. *I will never leave thee nor forsake thee*, is the promise of the Almighty to those that put their trust in him, and commit their souls to his keeping. But glorious and comfortable as this promise may be, let it not lead

any of us to fold our arms in an indolent security, as if nothing were to be done on our part. This abuse of the promises of God, and the succours of grace, must prove fatal to our best interests; for the *fall* of St. Peter is as much adapted to excite vigilance, as his *recovery* is to prevent despair. It is a perpetual admonition to avoid temptations, as far as is possible and consistent with duty: for if it is comfortable to be restored, it is much more so not to fall. Happy indeed they, who, when they are assailed by trials and temptations, combat them through the succours of Heaven, and come off victorious. But because this victory is not always sure, wise are they who prudently avoid them. The good man in our text ran into the way of danger without necessity; and thus, trusting with too much confidence in the warmth of his zeal, and the imagined goodness of his principles, he was surprised by temptation, and fell from his integrity. Let us profit by the warning which his example holds forth: let vigilance and prudence, accompanied with an humble sense of our infirmity, and a pious dependence on the succours of Heaven, be the constant guides
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of our moral conduct ; they will happily contribute to make us *stedfast and immovable* in our Christian course ; they will render our resolutions effectual, and our perseverance steady and victorious. *Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.*

With these rules and precautions, the example of this apostle's glorious restoration to the favour of God and the paths of virtue will shed consolation and hope through the heart of the Christian in the day of trial and infirmity : but it is to the sincere Christian alone that this consolation and hope belong. They do not belong to you, who resemble St. Peter only in his fall, and not in the ingenuous and salutary contrition with which he lamented his defection, and the signal fidelity and sublime virtues with which he crowned his return to the profession he had dishonoured. It is rather to be lamented than disguised, that the Christian profession is often dishonoured by a false shame in those who silently and without any mark of disapprobation hear the cause of religion attacked by the infidel, or profaned by the indecent raillery of the licentious. This is a sort of denial of the Saviour which be-

trays a very criminal weakness of mind: it surely can never take place in those who have a full persuasion, a lively sense of the dignity of their Divine Master, the excellence and importance of his doctrine, and the grandeur of his immortal promises. Such, *knowing in whom they have believed*, will never be *ashamed of the gospel of Christ*; on the contrary, they will glory in the name of their Divine Redeemer; and, after having been *faithful even unto the death*, shall obtain from him the crown of eternal life.

DISCOURSE XXI.

On the Tendency of Religion to excite a Spirit of
Union and Energy in the Time of Danger.

[Delivered at the Hague, February 13, 1793, on the day of the
General Fast, immediately after the French had declared war
against the Dutch in the person of their Stadtholder.]

JEREMIAH, xiii. 16.

*Give glory to the Lord your God, before he cause
DARKNESS, and before your feet STUMBLE
on the dark mountains, and while ye look for
LIGHT, he turn it into the shadow of DEATH,
and make it gross darkness.*

WE have never been called to the celebra-
tion of our annual and national Fast
under an aspect of things so ominous and
alarming as that which is presented to us at
this moment. A cloud (if I may use the me-

taphor of the text) has arisen in our neighbourhood, loaded with calamity and destruction, and we need not enumerate the horrors that have already proceeded from its bosom; they are known to you in all their atrocity; and where is the heart that has not felt them with astonishment and anguish? The daily recital of them oppresses the heart;—piety is troubled at the view of them;—humanity weeps over them; and they are marked with such strange and dreadful characters of novelty, that to describe them farther, would only disturb that calm spirit of pious recollection, contrition, and confidence, with which we ought to humble ourselves, on this solemn day, before the throne of God.

This is surely a time to enter, like *Asaph*, into the *sanctuary* of the Divine Providence, which is the high refuge of the religious mind, amidst the tumults and calamities of a transitory world. As the hand of the Most High is evidently stretched out to visit the nations, let us hear the voice that calls us to *give glory* to him, before he permits the calamitous darkness of these unhappy times to extend to us, and

and to cover a country which has been long and often peculiarly distinguished by his almighty protection.

The words of our text were addressed by the prophet to a people who had long continued ungrateful and impenitent, under the most signal mercies and the most solemn warnings of Providence. At length, however, the time approached when the *decree* was to *bring forth* and unfold its terrors. Jeremiah, divinely instructed to connect the fate of nations with the empire of Providence, had frequently admonished the people of their danger, but in vain. They went on enjoying the calm season of their prosperity with a lethargic security; and, not considering how soon a serene sky might be overcast with clouds, they took no precautions against the evil day. In the mean time, the prophet saw the cloud gathering which was to involve Jerusalem in a fatal *darkness*, and he addresses to the people the solemn admonition of our text: *Give glory to the Lord your God, before he cause DARKNESS, and before your feet stumble on the dark mountains, and while you*
E E 3 *look*

look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness.

The scenes of confusion and calamity, which were opening to this unhappy country, are here represented by expressive metaphors, which have a determinate sense in the prophetic writings. *Darkness* is always used to denote great calamities; such as war, famine, civil discords, and popular commotions: as *light*, on the contrary, is employed to signify peace, abundance, and other national blessings.

Before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, is a phrase which represents, in a lively manner, a state of perplexity, precipitation, and distress, occasioned by the sudden approach of danger or adversity, against which national virtue and prudent foresight had made no preparation. This was precisely the state of the Jews when they were surprised by a hostile invasion. When the Babylonians arrived, their lethargy was awakened into astonishment and anxiety; their efforts were ill-directed and ineffectual; and, while they *sought for light*, (i. e. for national safety,) *it was turned into darkness and the shadow of death.*

After

After horrid scenes of carnage, in which the royal family was not spared, they were carried into captivity; and thus were verified the predictions of the prophets, which had been regarded as vain declamation by the minute philosophers of the time, who, sunk in an indolent sensuality, the fostering parent of irreligion, and the mortal enemy of all public spirit, had been perpetually crying out, *the Lord shall do no good, neither shall he do evil.*

We would hope that the inhabitants of this republic neither resemble the people to whom these words were addressed in their moral state, nor in the fate that awaited them in the dispensations of Providence. They are, nevertheless, so far applicable to our present circumstances, as to furnish the most solemn and salutary admonitions in this dark and critical period of time. In this point of view they present to our serious consideration two important objects:

First, A time of danger, in which trying scenes of calamity and darkness may be too justly apprehended.

Secondly, A solemn and national duty, to which this time of danger loudly calls us.

Give glory to the Lord your God, before he cause darkness, &c.

I. *First*, The present time is a time of danger, in which trying scenes of calamity and darkness may be justly apprehended. The awful events that alarm us on all sides, are proper to dispel all illusion on this head, and they must naturally excite a painful sensibility in every heart.—There are *three* plagues which have for some time past been extending their fatal influence through a considerable part of the Continent; and they threaten the destruction of all social order, all personal security and domestic comfort, all public and national felicity. They have been formed and fostered, since the commencement of the present century in the bosom of the most corrupt nation in Christendom, and have now issued forth with combined fury; carrying desolation and misery wherever they come, and exciting painful anxiety wherever their approach is apprehended. And, as if the present period of time were to be marked with the strangest characters of contradiction and absurdity, these plagues derive their origin from the schools of a pretended philosophy,

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whose

whose imperious pedagogues set themselves up as the law-givers and dictators of the human race. And what are the plagues which this philosophy has produced? Alas! the *tree is known by its fruits*, and its fruits are a *spirit of irreligion*, a *spirit of popular commotion*, and a *spirit of war and dominion*, exerted under the bloody mask of a fantastic and spurious liberty.

1. The first fruit of this gloomy and dreadful philosophy is a spirit of *irreligion*; and this indeed, by disengaging conscience from the influence of all authority, human and divine, and letting loose the reign to every irregular passion, gives a fatal nourishment to the other plagues now mentioned. But what must we think of a spirit of irreligion proceeding from *philosophy*? This surely is a monstrous production; it is a strange and total inversion of the order of things; it is, however, of a piece with the other unnatural productions of the day. In the times of Paganism the only true notions which were entertained concerning a Supreme Being and a ruling Providence were found in the schools of the philosophers, and
not

not in the colleges of the priests and augurs ; and philosophy was the only guide they had to religion and morals. And how would the sages of Athens and Rome have stood astonished, had it been predicted to them, that in the future and more enlightened ages of the world, and even under the advantages of a Divine Revelation, (which the most eminent of these sages * almost foresaw,) atheism and irreligion would one day be propagated under the name of philosophy, and a *pantheon* of departed profligates (metamorphosed into heroes and demi-gods) erected to insult the divine religion of *Him* who was the *Light of the world*?

The article of *religion*, as a national as well as a personal concern, is the great object that ought principally to employ our meditations on this solemn day, when we present ourselves before the Ruler of nations, to acknowledge his empire and to implore his protection. Religion is the *true* philosophy of celestial wisdom ; it is the instructor, the guide, and the friend of man in all his relations, and

* Socrates.

in all the circumstances of enjoyment or suffering in which he can be placed. To the individual it is a source of consolation and an anchor of hope, amidst all the transient tumults and disorders of the world ; and as it strengthens all the bonds of social order and moral virtue, it dignifies, strengthens, and exalts a nation. Consider with candour the spirit and tendency of the Gospel of Jesus ; the character it is adapted to form in the true Christian who embraces it in its genuine simplicity, disengaged from the abuses of superstition and enthusiasm, and the influence that such a character must have in promoting the best interests of civil society. This divine Gospel, you know, sends its gentle but commanding power where human laws cannot reach,—even into the secret recesses of the heart ; it connects the Christian with God, as the creator, the benefactor, the saviour of men, the searcher of hearts, the assertor of righteousness, and the judge of the world. It governs his sentiments and affections as well as his conduct and actions, and engages him to be virtuous in his own eye as well as in the eyes of the world.

world. It addresses its divine language equally to the highest and the lowest in human society; because their essential interests, both in time and in eternity, are equally concerned in the instructions it administers. It sheds peace in the cottage of the peasant; it forms the manners of the citizen to order and justice; it adds new dignity to sovereignty, softens subordination, and, after having promoted all the salutary ends of a wise and happy government here below, it prepares the temporary subjects of earthly empires for a kingdom of order, peace, and felicity, *which shall never be moved.*

And it is the salutary influence, it is the sacred authority of *this* Gospel, that a notorious confederacy has, for many years past, been endeavouring to undermine and destroy: first, in secret, by perfidious intrigues even in the cabinets of princes; and afterwards more openly by licentious publications, in which the imagination, deluded by vicious pleantry, and the passions, inflamed by every art of seduction, corrupted the judgment, and procured for sophistry an easy access,
especially

especially to youthful and unexperienced minds.

But all attempts to extirpate or undermine by violence or sophistry the dispensation of celestial truth and mercy, which has already triumphed over so many forms of opposition in the world, are as vain as they are impious. For *the foundation of God standeth sure* *, and neither the powers of darkness nor the rage of the wicked shall finally prevail against it. The time will come (and perhaps that time is not far off) when the most outrageous enemies of that Gospel which God in his mercy has given to man as a source of redemption and a rule of life, shall be *broken asunder*, and be dispersed *like chaff before the wind*, for the instruction of the less guilty nations of the world.

In the mean time, are we in no danger from the poisonous contagion of that *irreligious spirit* which has gained such fatal ground in these latter days? Are there no ominous symptoms of it in the midst of us? These are important questions, and we cannot answer them without

* 2 Tim. ii. 19.

affliction. It is true, the inhabitants of this republic have been always deemed a religious people—and can they ever cease to be such, until they loose sight of their marvellous origin, and of the long series of providential wonders by which they have been sustained and preserved against the usual course of second causes, though by glorious instruments? For *what nation is there who have had God so nigh unto them as the Lord your God hath been to you in all things that you called upon him for* *? Ah! never lose sight of these things!—tell them to your children;—transmit them to your children's children, that they may keep alive that spirit of religion and of religious fortitude which animated your forefathers to such heroic deeds as will render your annals respectable and illustrious in all ages.

But though this nation has not, in the main, forfeited its religious character; though the number of those who know, by their inward peace and transporting hopes, what a happy thing it is to be a Christian, is far from being inconsiderable in this republic; though the

* Deuteronomy, iv. 7.

edifying appearance of real devotion and pious recollection with which the solemn service of this day is performed, affords a comfortable presumption, that there are multitudes in this favoured land who have adopted that memorable vow of Joshua—*As for me and my house we will serve the Lord* ; yet it must be confessed, that there are many exceptions to lament on this head.—We do not affirm this from our own observation. It is the complaint of our sovereigns, in the proclamation which assembles us at this time.—They complain of the increase of a cold indifference with respect to religion ; and it is certain that religion has, in a great measure, lost its influence on the minds of many, who have neither renounced the belief nor the profession of Christianity. It is to them neither a source of consolation in affliction, nor a buckler against the temptations of prosperity, nor a rule of life and manners. It neither awakens their consciences, nor restrains their irregular passions, nor betters their hearts, nor excites their zeal for the service of that Divine Redeemer who has called them out *of darkness into his marvellous light*, and whose service is the most perfect freedom.

They

They complain of “ a spirit of luxury and levity, which receives no restraint even from the admonitions of an alarming Providence.” And is this complaint without foundation? It is true, our refinements in luxury are not carried to such a length as they are in other nations, where fertile and extensive territories furnish with facility sources of opulence, and nature sheds her treasures with a liberal and lavish hand. They are, however, gone far enough to threaten the rapid decline of a country where the parsimony of nature, in a small territory, can only be compensated by a sober simplicity of life and manners, and by laborious and persevering industry:—they are gone far enough to multiply those imaginary wants which render the individuals of a nation *selfish*, and consequently indisposed to furnish, from their opulence, a resource to the public in time of need:—they are gone far enough to relax both our principles and our morals, and to produce among us (as they generally do in smaller states) a decline of genius, talent, capacity, and public spirit.

And what a humiliating contrast do these things make with the alarming circumstances
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in which we are actually placed? In the most peaceable times these symptoms of national corruption ought to excite sorrow and shame; but in *the day of darkneſs*, when the tempeſt is preparing its terrors all around us, they muſt wound every virtuous and feeling mind, and ſink the heart into diſcouragement and deſpondency.

We muſt not diſguiſe our moral ſtate, which has ſuch a momentous influence on our national conſiſtence, dignity, and proſperity: and it muſt be confeſſed that our moral ſtate has been gradually declining in many reſpects. That virtuous ſimplicity of manners, that maſculine and ſteady vigour of mind, which diſtinguiſhed the men of ancient days, have undergone a viſible alteration in our times. It is, among other things, remarkable that we have been corrupted by that nation which for above a century paſt has been the corrupter of Europe, and is now extravagantly attempting to involve it in barbariſm and anarchy. Our young men reſorted thither to finiſh their education and poliſh their manners, and too frequently returned with the infection of its infidelity, its luxury, and its vices. Thus

that nation did us more real injury by their examples, their *philosophy*, and their modes, than they have ever done by their arms and their intrigues, though they sometimes invaded and laid waste our territories with hostile fury, and have often seduced us into labyrinths of perplexity and distress, under the mask of friendship. But that nation will corrupt us no more.—On the contrary, it holds forth to *us*, and to *all* the nations of the world, an example every way proper to terrify and instruct. It shews us in what the maxims of an impious philosophy, and the licentious frenzy of unprincipled *liberty*, terminate, by the complicated scenes of misery which they have exhibited to our observation; for, amidst the temporary success of its romantic exploits, we see all the branches of its prosperity blasted;—millions of its inhabitants, at home or in exile, involved in all the horrors of carnage, famine, and despair, and all the symptoms of approaching ruin fermenting in its bosom.

Happy would it be for human nature and civil society, if the dreadful example of this infatuated people produced effects still more salutary than a preservative, merely against
their

their overgrown corruption ! It is not enough to behold with horror the sanguinary spirit of *Anarchy* and *Barbarism* to which irreligion and atheism open a full career by removing the most respectable and powerful restraints which can be imposed upon the passions of men. Is not this calamitous example likewise adapted to change into zeal that cold indifference which so often accompanies the external profession of Christianity ? Ought it not to make us all perceive and feel, with new degrees of conviction and sensibility, the excellence and importance of that divine religion which is the vital principle of right conduct, social order, and true satisfaction in all our relations in *this* life, as well as in those which we hope to form or renew in a better ?

2. The *second* plague which has proceeded from the pretended philosophy of certain reformers, and which renders the times *dark* and calamitous, is a spirit of popular commotion and intestine discord. This plague is often expressed in the sacred writings under the image of *darkness*, on account of the dismal and destructive confusion it produces. And if there ever was a time when this poison of

public felicity ought to be the object of our most serious attention, it is in this hour of religious meditation, when we come to plead with the mercy of Heaven for the salvation of our country. We need not describe the horrid commotions and insurrections which the novel doctrines of these times have excited in a country at this moment perishing in convulsions under their fatal influence ; nor need we mention the odious methods which that degraded nation has employed to stir up a spirit of insubordination and rebellion in all the countries of Europe, and even in more distant parts of the world. Their attempts have not been entirely unsuccessful : for if they have totally *overturned* no government but their own, (whose despotism and corruption called, indeed, loudly for *reformation*,) they have disturbed well-being, order, and tranquillity in many states. Their doctrines and projects, when only promoted by sophistry, intrigue, and pompous declamations on such ambiguous words as *natural equality* and the *rights of men*, deluded many : but since violence and assassination have become the permanent supporters of their anarchy at home,

and

and sacrilege and plunder the instruments of its propagation abroad, the eyes of mankind begin to open: the specious mask that covered a pestilential philosophy is falling, and its *occult qualities*, (if I may use that expression,) being known by their *fruits*, will come forth to view in their genuine colours, and will appear to be nothing more than the lust of dominion and rapine, or, at best, the fanaticism of disordered brains.

It is certain that popular tumults and insurrections must be considered as the most fatal and criminal calamities that can afflict a country. In Scripture-history they are often mentioned as the decisive marks of God's final judgments; they are even placed in the list of those awful circumstances that are to precede the dissolution of the world. However that may be, they are, in the nature of things, when they become permanent and excessive, convulsive symptoms of the ruin of a nation. In such an unnatural state of things, all laws and authority, human and divine, being reduced to contempt, the reins are let loose to every passion. A lawless multitude are set in

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motion,

motion, and the best members of society are at the mercy of the worst. No security remains for our persons or our property. All our social enjoyments are embittered, and all the comforts of our domestic relations become objects of terror, on account of the dangers which threaten them.

If such a spirit of disorder should arise in this peaceable and industrious country, merciful Heaven! what would become of us? We had painful symptoms of it some years ago, which fraternal charity would wish to forget, but which, in wisdom and prudence, we are obliged to recollect, that we may prevent their return, arm ourselves with the sacred principles of religion and virtue against the licentious maxims that produce them, and point out, as the enemies of human society and human felicity, the persons that would dare to renew our discords. Our late troubles were fomented and inflamed by the same unprincipled enemy who threatens us at present with unjust, unprovoked hostilities; and had they not been providentially suppressed, they would have involved us in calamities

Tamities similar to those which have been produced in our neighbourhood by the fury of fanatical reformers and lawgivers. Even the progress they made was afflicting, by its unhappy effects on our national strength and resources. We shall not enter into any farther detail concerning them, as all these things must be fresh in your memory. But we ask,—Where is the virtuous citizen, whatever his political opinions may be, who would wish the return of such times, to trouble the tranquillity and blast the prosperity of a country where the voice of the oppressor was never heard, where *every man sitteth under his own vine and his own fig-tree* *, under the protection of a mild government and equal laws; with full security for his person and property, the freedom of his actions and opinions, and the unmolested enjoyment of all his social and domestic comforts?

But these are not the only considerations that would render popular commotions criminal and odious at this time. There is a circumstance that would render them flagitious

* Zechar. iii. 10.

and treasonable in a very high degree; and that is, the hostile standard which, with equal treachery and violence, is raised to encourage and support them. What! is it at the moment when a fierce and cruel enemy threatens to insult us in the bosom of our profound and neutral tranquillity, that any would work to his hand by troubling our internal peace? In what light must we consider such as are capable of expecting with pleasure, or beholding with indifference, these lawless invaders? Can we consider them as Christians? No; let not that sacred, that benevolent denomination be defiled by its application to the fomentor of civil discord under a hostile standard, under the protection of armed legions, who have renounced even the *profession* of religion, as well as the laws of justice and humanity. Can we consider them as *true* patriots?—a term whose prostitution we deplore. Surely there is no virtuous citizen, no true patriot, who, in a moment of cool and candid reflection, would be willing to sacrifice the inestimable blessings and privileges we enjoy, to the pursuit of a spurious and chimerical liberty, which (when-
ever

ever attempts have been made to introduce it) has produced nothing but disorder and desolation.

But though popular commotions and tumults deserve to be considered as the greatest of all temporal calamities, and render the times *dark* and *perilous* in the highest degree, yet there is another circumstance which, as it is somewhat related to them, and sometimes excites them, we cannot pass over in silence. What I have here in view is a *violent* party-spirit, and a want of union among the heads and members of a nation, more especially in the *prospect of common danger*. We are ordered this day, by the Sovereign, to pray to God, the author of peace and the lover of concord, that he would be pleased to remove our discords and heal our divisions. This emboldens us to touch that sore, that dangerous wound, which festers in the bosom of our national health and felicity. Discords and divisions, even in peaceable times, retard the progress of national prosperity, particularly when they are nourished by corrupt principles and selfish views: but in the period of danger,

when

when the commonwealth is threatened by a foreign enemy, they are criminal and disastrous in the extreme. In such a case, it is only when the *mariners* join hearts and hands to *ride out the storm*, that the public vessel, which carries all that is dear to us as men and Christians, can, with the succours of the Almighty, be saved from shipwreck.

• We have lately seen a noble and animating proof of this in the British Isles. They are not without *their* portion of party-spirit and political dissension. But when the prospect of common danger called for their union ; when they saw a plan, equally absurd and portentous, formed by the distracted regicides of our day, to overturn thrones, to extirpate sovereigns, and to propagate universal disorder and anarchy ; what happened ? They forgot their divisions ; they suspended the execution of unseasonable projects ; they united, as in a phalanx, in support of their liberty, their laws, their constitution, and their country, and (with few exceptions) rose in one virtuous and majestic body, under the standard of their pious monarch, to *play the man* for the salvation

vation of their Israel and the *cities of their God**.

And shall not we also forget *our* divisions, the low attractions of partial views and separate interests, while the enemies of Heaven and earth menace our peace, our constitution, and our independence? Where shall we find strength, under the protection of Heaven, to ward off the evils that threaten us, but in united hearts and in united counsels? *Be strong and strengthen one another*, said Samuel to the people of Israel, under the apprehension of common danger. This spirit of union (according to the words of the prophet) makes *a little one to become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation* †, and shews that the Most High is in the midst of a people, with a presence of favour and protection. It was thus that your country has often been saved, even on the very brink of destruction, and saved by instruments (sacred be their memory!) who had nothing to oppose to the formidable legions of the *Nebuchadnezzars* and *Sennacheribs* of their day, but their patriotic union, their

* 2 Samuel, x. 12.

† Isaiah, lx. 22.

persevering

persevering valour, and their trust in Heaven. Let not then their descendants, in this hour of darkness, exhibit the dismal spectacle of a discouraged and divided people. *We are destroyed, if we are divided.* This is the motto which we find inscribed on one of those medals which mark the virtuous and heroic period of this republic, when union of counsels, efforts, and powers rendered its name great and respectable among the nations. This was the *old path*, the good *old way* *, in which your ancestors walked, and in which they found *rest* and *dignity* after their glorious labours.

3. To the two plagues which we have been now considering, is added a *third*, which has for some time been ravaging the countries in our neighbourhood, and is at this moment approaching the territories of this republic. This plague is War, which is declared against us by the sanguinary dictators of an infatuated people, whom Providence is permitting, for a time, to chastise *us*, before *they* perish. It is declared, with a palpable but insidious absurdity, against the First Member of the republic,

* Jeremiah, vi. 16.

with a design to excite divisions between the constituent branches of the union, and, under pretexts which profligacy can easily contrive, to render the whole community, and especially its more opulent members, the objects of devastation and plunder.

And how ought we to be affected by this hostile invasion? War, indeed, is a deplorable calamity. Considered in itself it is the reproach of nature and humanity; but considered as a dispensation of Providence, which permits the fury of the wicked to correct us by temporary shocks of adversity, it may be salutary in its fruits. It may restore the dying flame of piety and public spirit, where it has been nearly extinguished by luxurious ease: it may revive the vigour and energy of a people, and awaken them from that lethargy of sentiment and principle, which is the slow but mortal disease of a country. Was it not adversity, and more specially the calamities of war, that formed to noble and virtuous deeds the illustrious founders of this republic; that turned the Belgic burghers into heroes, and shewed that suffering and trials were the seeds of national prosperity and grandeur? War, then,

then, though deplorable in itself, may, through the direction of God's wise providence, terminate in a new and a better state of things to this republic, and in time to come give stability to its peace, and render its constitution and independence still more respectable. But this will depend on the pious improvement of our present critical situation, and on the blessing of the Almighty on our measures, our efforts, our arms, and those of our allies. Let us then *give* glory to the Lord our God, that he may not permit the *darkness* which approaches to overwhelm us, nor our *feet* to *stumble*, through confusion and perplexity, *on the dark mountains*, nor the *light* of deliverance, which we seek, to be turned into the *shadow of death* and *gross darkness*. Let us, above all things, consider these words of our text in the essential duties they require on our part; this is what we most earnestly recommend to you in the conclusion of this discourse.

II. This, indeed, is the great purpose of our present meeting. We come as a favoured, a sinful, and an alarmed people, before the throne of our Benefactor and our Judge: and if we do not come before him with the sentiments

and dispositions which this solemn and national act of religion supposes and requires ; if we have nothing to present to him this day but our transgressions and omissions, and these neither accompanied with a generous compunction, nor with sincere and fervent resolutions of amendment, to what will our solemn Fast amount ? Will it be an object of approbation in the eye of *Him* who is the *searcher of hearts*, and can only be pleased with sincerity and truth in the *inward parts* ? And if it be not the object of his approbation, will it recommend us to his protection in this critical period of danger and trial ? *Bring no more vain oblations*, was his awful admonition to his ancient people ; and does not the same voice address itself to us ? To suppose that the Supreme Being beholds with indifference the religious and moral characters of individuals and nations, is to fall into a kind of *atheism*, as impious and senseless as that which all good men lament and abhor in a neighbouring people ; for if the Atheist denies *His existence*, the impetent transgressor denies, or at least insults, *His government* and *His perfections* ; and without these what is *His existence* ?

Let

Let us then this day, in the *first place*, give glory to God, by a pious acknowledgment of his supreme dominion. This is that rational and elevating act of religion which, by connecting the world with its Author, and all events, both in our public and private relations, with the righteous and beneficent government of their great Disposer, opens to man the true sources of consolation, hope and moral improvement in all the different scenes and vicissitudes of human life. In effect, what strength and constancy of mind must the religious man, the virtuous citizen, receive from this habitual act of veneration and homage to that Sovereign Majesty that governs the world? It nourishes in his mind the full and happy persuasion, that neither his interests, nor the interests of his country, are at the disposal of *blind chance* or a *fatal necessity*; those *vain idols* which afford neither consolation nor help to man in the time of trouble. He sees them, on the contrary, placed in the hands of the Great Being who, during this probationary state, sends prosperity, that we may *rejoice* with gratitude in his benignity; and adversity, that we may *consider* our errors and
our

our abuses, and be corrected by the discipline of his wisdom : and who, in the final result of things, will make all events, even those that are the most painful and afflicting, terminate in the happiness of his faithful servants.

Secondly, Let us give glory to the Lord our God by our *gratitude* and *contrition*. We join these two sentiments together, because we appear this day both as a favoured and a sinful nation before our offended Benefactor ; and if we can recollect our past blessings, and the manner in which we have improved them, without ingenuous confusion and sorrow, we are certainly unworthy to appear in his presence. We had enjoyed during a long period (before our late troubles) the precious blessings of peace and true liberty, and saw the revolving years pass without any anxious or alarming apprehensions. But the blessings of Heaven lost their impressions upon us by the very circumstance that ought to have rendered them affecting, even their long continuance ; and they were neither improved to the advancement of our national strength and happiness, nor to enliven our gratitude and animate our obedience to the Rock of our Salva-

tion. Even in this present moment of painful apprehension, the long-suffering patience of God has not withdrawn from us the precious marks of his favour and protection, and the actual possession of many inestimable blessings, shews that his loving-kindness is unwilling to depart from us. Therefore let *all that is within us be stirred up to magnify his name*, before his mercies be withdrawn, and the *day of darkness* and calamity comes upon us. From the ingenuous compunction of contrite hearts, that sincerely lament the abuse of his gifts and the transgression of his laws, let us send up our penitential supplications to this throne of grace, that *he would not cast us off for ever*, but *be the hope and saviour of our Israel in the time of trouble*, and *in the midst of deserved wrath remember mercy*.

Lastly, Let the effusions of our gratitude and contrition be accompanied with *solemn vows and deliberate resolutions of reformation and obedience*. This is the great purpose of our National Fast; the ultimate end to which our acknowledgment of God's empire, gratitude for his mercies, and contrition for our sins, directly point. This supposes and requires the

the candid review of our manifold transgressions, of our irregular passions, of our corrupt habits, of our false notions of duty and happiness, that, through the succours of the great Sanctifier of minds, who *gives grace to the humble* and strength to the feeble, we may combat and subdue those mortal enemies both of our temporal and eternal felicity. Without this true spirit of reformation what solid foundation can we have for hope, amidst the evils we suffer and the calamities which threaten us? If we seek for deliverance by means unaccompanied with piety and virtue, have we not too much reason to fear that the hand of the Most High will confound our devices, and make our unrighteous enemies his *scourge*, to afflict us grievously, before their iniquities turn finally upon themselves, and accomplish their perdition? And should this be the case, what should we have to plead in our behalf in the day of our visitation? We could only say to the Ruler of Nations, *Righteousness belongeth unto thee, O God! but unto us shame and confusion of face, to our rulers, to our princes, and to our fathers; because we have sinned against thee.* Let us adopt this ingenuous
2 confession;

confession ; but let us not stop here. Let us sound the depths of conscience, and, examining our respective duties and obligations, let us adopt also the pious vow of Joshua, and say, every one for himself, with an humble dependence on the Divine grace, *As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.* Did such a resolution crown the celebration of our solemn Fast, then should we have nothing to fear. No: even under the ominous clouds that hang over our heads, we should have nothing to fear from the rage of man, and we should have every thing to hope from the protection of God. For then might we look with unshaken confidence to the Supreme Disposer of all events, who is able to save *by many or by few*, and under whose direction the arrangement of things that seems the most unfavourable to our hopes may become the occasion of our deliverance. *O then that there were in us such a heart, that we would fear God and keep his commandments, that it might be well with us and with our children ! Amen.*

T H E E N D.











